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Kluth, Paula (2010) *"You're Going to Love This Kid!" Teaching Students with Autism in the Inclusive Classroom.*
Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company.

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In *"You're Going to Love This Kid!" Teaching Students with Autism in the Inclusive Classroom*, Paula Kluth tackles an issue of educational, psychological, and sociological importance: the inclusion (or lack thereof) of autistic children into 'mainstream' classrooms. Kluth begins with a chapter on autism itself – and, more broadly, various conditions along the autistic spectrum. I believe that this is crucial to the success of the book. She does not assume that mainstream teachers will be intimately aware of the intricacies of autism, and she therefore provides an overview of the nature of the condition psychologically, biologically (e.g., senses and reactions to affronts on them), emotionally, behaviorally, and socially, citing a variety of sources, from the DSM-IV-TR manual to quotes from autistic individuals themselves. Beyond a

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description of the condition itself, also included in this chapter is a brief discussion of diagnosis and labeling, and an introduction to the varied learning differences inherent in many autistic individuals.

Given these many varied differences from one autistic child to another, Kluth rightly notes that it is inappropriate to place children in one classroom or another based solely upon a diagnosis or a label (e.g., “autistic”). Rather, the most important consideration in placing them should be how the condition manifests *in that child*, and the degree to which that child may or may not be able to function appropriately in a mainstream schooling environment. This is particularly true with conditions such as autism and disorders along the autistic spectrum, which can manifest very differently from child to child.

To this end, throughout the book, Kluth offers various instructional approaches on how best to teach children with autism, as well as excellent suggestions as to how educators can support students with autism both in the classroom and beyond. She provides a crucial discussion of pedagogical strategies such as frequent breaks and popular picture boards, and I could not agree more heartily with her contentions to “prioritize prevention” and to always keep the student at the heart of educational considerations. However, I also believe that some of the things that she discusses as reasons for inclusion (e.g., promoting student dignity) are not necessarily lost when a student is unable to be included in a mainstream classroom.

This is where I believe the book could be improved. As the reader can probably infer from the title of the book, its goal is to promote inclusion for autistic students within the mainstream classroom. Likewise, it is also designed to help school systems or educators searching for best ways to abide by inclusion laws to make those adaptations successfully. I believe the book accomplishes these goals admirably. Nevertheless, as a result of these goals, the reader must recognize that this book will be insufficient for someone looking for an unbiased assessment regarding whether inclusion is an appropriate practice, in what circumstances, and with what support. While the book offers a lot of excellent information on inclusion, one must read it with the knowledge that it is inherently biased

toward extensive inclusion, and must therefore look elsewhere for a book presenting and evaluating educational options on an equal footing.

Further, in some cases, Kluth appears to overstate her position by insinuating that ‘inclusion’ in schools as it is discussed in her book is about including everyone into the same theoretical classroom, crossing boundaries of developmental disability, physical disability, race, ethnicity, ESL students, and gay and lesbian students (e.g., p. 23). It seems unrealistic – and in fact somewhat concerning – that inclusion of race (etc) might be compared to inclusion of developmentally or socially disabled students. On the most basic level – and at the level at which we are concerned within the educational realm – the former are not subject to special learning needs, while the latter generally are. The former function fully within a mainstream classroom as educationally and developmentally equal to their classmates, while the latter necessitate (often substantial) accommodations in order to remain in a mainstream classroom. To compare the two on any level is therefore both perplexing and disconcerting, regardless of how one feels about inclusion. The issue is not so much “separate but equal” as it is the consideration of whether it is appropriate to sacrifice entire aspects of the curriculum, as was the case in some examples in this book, in order to support the learning of one student, while an entire classroom of students may have their education curtailed as a result, and therefore may never be sufficiently challenged in an inclusive classroom.

To this end, the book appears to purport multiple perspectives – in some places the book purports that classrooms should adjust their curriculum in order to accommodate students with autism, while in other places it argues that students do not need to engage in the curriculum in order to “be in” a mainstream classroom. The latter view of inclusion is more agreeable to the degree that it does not considerably compromise the education of and degree of challenge presented to other learners. However, when this is the view adopted, one (a devil’s advocate, perhaps) must also wonder whether the autistic student would not be better off in classroom in which he or she could engage, as opposed to operating on the periphery of a mainstream classroom with an aide.

Having said this, however, I want to emphasize that such observations are not intended to undermine the value of the book in anyway, as it is perfectly acceptable for a book to take a position and subsequently defend it, as Kluth does superbly. Rather, I suggest simply that the reader looking for an unbiased view might look elsewhere. Those concerned solely with defending inclusion in their school systems will find ample resources in Kluth's book. At the end of each chapter, she provides a list of readings that may be of further interest, or provide further information supplementing that particular chapter, and at the end of the book as a whole she provides an extensive bibliography citing further resources. Such further references are enormously helpful, and much appreciated by the conscientious reader. The book is also supplemented by lists of discussion questions pertaining to each chapter, which can serve as an excellent resource for school systems or educators who are debating the benefits of inclusion within their classrooms.

Kluth also offers a variety of further resources, and makes their reproduction available to educators at no charge. For instance, the checklist provided on pages 34-35 is helpful in that it illuminates various types of inclusion within the school environment. For instance, it highlights the fact that inclusion can be evident at all levels of students' functioning within a school system. It also delineates a clear plan for school systems looking to promote inclusion. Nevertheless, I believe that the operationalization of some of the constructs in the checklist could be clearer. For example, "Do staff development opportunities reflect an inclusive philosophy?" is too general to be of adequate benefit. Rather, specific opportunities should be characterized with examples to give way to more accurate identification, measurement, and action planning for school systems opting to utilize the checklist (or other forms in the book).

Further, Kluth appropriately considers relevant acts and laws, and other considerations such as the mandate requiring that all students be placed in the Least Restrictive Environment possible, considering the nature of their disability. She describes Individualized Education Plans, and students' right to a "free appropriate public education," and describes what these mean for autistic

learners within the context of an inclusive educational environment. I would have liked to have seen more discussion of supplemental programs such as “Best Buddies,” whereby autistic (or otherwise disabled) children are paired with mainstreamed students, but their exclusion does not significantly restrict the book’s contribution.

In sum, Kluth’s book is an important one in that it takes a stand for the inclusion of autistic students within mainstream classrooms, an issue with which many school districts and parents are currently battling. It is important that resources like this exist for those looking to integrate inclusive practices within their school systems, whether such proponents are parents, teachers, or administrators. While the book was clearly biased toward full inclusion, as stated earlier, this does not negate the contribution that it can provide: It simply means that individuals seeking a critical discussion of the pros and cons of the issue need to look elsewhere. Most importantly, perhaps, Kluth’s book, at its core, is empathetic. Kluth clearly has a unmatched passion for her work, and this is precisely the type of person that we as a society need to stand up for the needs and rights of others, as she does exceptionally well within the bounds of this book.

About the Reviewer

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