



On Seeking Simplicity



James M Kauffman^{1*}, Marion Felder², Garry Hornby³ and Joao Lopes⁴

¹*Emeritus, University of Virginia, USA*

²*University of Applied Sciences, Germany*

³*Emeritus, University of Koblenz, UK*

⁴*University of Minho, Campus de Gualtar, Portugal*

Submission: May 30, 2022 **Published:** June 23, 2022

***Corresponding author:** James M Kauffman, Emeritus, University of Virginia, USA

Abstract

Simple solutions to complex problems are sometimes suggested, but the proposed simple solutions are often wrong. We are well advised to seek simplicity, but also to distrust it. Among the complex problems for which simple solutions are suggested for working with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities are categorization and educational placement. The proposed simple solution for these needs is sometimes "full inclusion." However, this needs to be tested against relevant knowledge, logic, and evidence of effectiveness before it is adopted or mandated.

Keywords: Disabilities; Regular classrooms; Simplicity

On Seeking Simplicity

The 14th century philosopher William of Ockham gave us the idea known now as Occam's Razor-those simpler explanations of phenomena are better than more complicated ones, because they are easier to understand and to communicate to others. The law of parsimony tells us not to needlessly complicate things, that convolution should be avoided when it is not necessary. And in Hamlet, Shakespeare included the classic observation, "Brevity is the soul of wit."

People wisely seek simplicity and brevity, but nearly everyone can recall the sage statement that for every complicated issue there is an answer that is clear and simple but wrong. So, the best advice is to both seek simplicity and at the same time to distrust it, to seek it but be skeptical of the claim that it is an adequate answer to the problem in question, and to check to see whether the simple solution actually works for solving the complex problem in real life.

Seeking and distrusting simplicity can be applied to both explanations of events that have occurred and to hypotheticals or problems of logic. That is, Occam's Razor applies not only to things that have already happened but to things that have not, to problems of "did" and problems of "could" or "might", or to "if-then" propositions. The law of parsimony tells us to seek

simplicity, and the sage advice to distrust it applies not only to what we have done but also to what we might try.

When it comes to educating individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, these ideas about simplicity and its distrust can be applied to at least two particular issues: educational placement and categorization (also sometimes called identification or labeling). These are both complicated issues with which people have struggled for decades, so it is tempting to imagine reducing their complexity dramatically with simple, short bromides.

"Inclusion" is one of those bromides, applying to the complex matter of selecting the least restrictive environment (known in the USA as the LRE) for teaching individuals with disabilities, including intellectual and developmental disabilities. If a full array of placement options for education, ranging from hospitals, special schools, special classes, and resource rooms to regular classrooms, can be reduced to fewer choices-and, especially, if all options are removed, such that there is full inclusion or inclusionary education only-then hard choices regarding placement can be averted [1]. The idea of full inclusion is now internationally popular and portrayed as a goal [2], but it is often misunderstood as a right [3], is infeasible in practice [4-7], and far from a universal choice

of parents and teachers [8]. In short, full inclusion is one of those simple-but-wrong proposed solutions to a complex problem. It is a simple solution for which distrust is fully warranted.

A major benefit of “full inclusion” is that it takes the pressure off identifying children with disabilities. Since they are all to be educated in mainstream classrooms it is not necessary to categorize them for placement in different educational settings. So full inclusion offers a simple solution to the contested issue of categorization leading to stigmatization. Therefore, full inclusion promises to address both the contentious issues of educational placement and categorization with one simple solution.

However, categorizing, labeling and otherwise identifying individuals with disabilities are complex matters for which proposed simple solutions are often suggested. Simple solutions often heard or read about are to (a) not do them at all, (b) do them, but with less specificity, such that they are more general or vague, and (c) change the word used to refer to them.

The first suggested solution, not doing them at all (a), is so obviously not a solution as to be absurd, for we cannot discuss what we will not name [9]. Moreover, although there are many important things that any category does not tell us, there are important things that it does. Functional language requires categories, but we also must be careful not to stereotype, to assume a category tells us something it does not [10].

The second proposed simple solution runs up against the reality that, as any science, craft, skill, or endeavor is better developed, its names, categories, and labels become more specific and differentiated [11]. This is true in teaching and otherwise intervening to help people with disabilities. Those who work with intellectual and developmental disabilities in any capacity need more precise language, not more vague, general, less informative terms. Thus, (b) is a proposed solution that requires devolution, retrogression, an embrace of more primitive language and less finely tailored practices.

Proposal (c) is reminiscent of old ideas that stigma is found in words, not the ideas, characteristics, or conditions to which they refer [11-15]. Changing the word used to designate something is typically a short-term strategy that confuses people about the referent and may reduce stigma-but only until people figure out what that word means or refers to. Then, the stigma is highly likely to return, sometimes with a vengeance. Better, but more complicated, to work on meanings rather than on words.

The world is full of complexities that frustrate us, and important among those are the identification and educational placement of students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Some complex problems do have relatively simple solutions, but most do not. We are well advised to try to find the

simplest solutions we can, but it is important to distrust them, and critically examine whether they are accurate and effective, before allowing them to replace more complex solutions. Any proposed solution to a problem needs to be tested against realities before it is adopted, including logical realities as well as those grounded in experience and knowledge.

References

1. Kauffman JM, Burke MC, Anastasiou D (in press). Hard LRE choices in the era of inclusion: Rights and their implications. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*.
2. Anastasiou D, Gregory M, Kauffman JM (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*. Oxford University Press, pp. 656-704.
3. Anastasiou D, Bantekas I (in press) Education for learners with disabilities as a social right. *University of Pennsylvania Journal of Constitutional Law*.
4. Gordon-Gould P, Hornby G (2023) *Inclusion at the crossroads: Exploring effective special needs provision in global contexts*. Routledge.
5. Kauffman JM (2022) This one, not that one: Toward revitalizing special education. In: JM Kauffman (Ed.), *Revitalizing special education: Revolution, devolution, and evolution*. Emerald, pp. 1-41.
6. Kauffman JM, Anastasiou D, Felder M, Hornby G, Lopes J (in press) Recent debates in special and inclusive education. In: R Tierney, F Rizvi, K Ercikan, G Smith, R Slee (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education* (4th edn). Elsevier.
7. Kauffman JM, Hornby G (2020) Inclusive vision versus special education reality. *Education Sciences* 10(9): 258.
8. Kauffman JM, Ahrbeck B, Anastasiou D, Badar J, Crockett JB, et al. (2022) Parents' and educators' perspectives on inclusion of students with disabilities. In: C Boyle, K Allen (Eds.), *Research for Sustainable Quality Education, Sustainable Goals Series*, pp. 205-217.
9. Kauffman JM, Anastasiou D (2018) Naming and maintaining: Two basic requirements for viable and vibrant education. In: LM Correia (Ed.), *Educação inclusiva & necessidades especiais (Inclusive education and special needs)*. Flora Editora, pp. 35-54.
10. Dutton K (2020) Black-and-white thinking: The burden of a binary brain in a complex world. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
11. Kauffman JM, Mock DR, Tankersley M, Landrum TJ (2008) Effective service delivery models. In: RJ Morris, N Mather (Eds.), *Evidence-based interventions for students with learning and behavioral challenges*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 359-378.
12. Hungerford R (1950) On locusts. *American Journal of Mental Deficiency* 54: 415-418.
13. Kauffman JM, Anastasiou D, Burke M, Felder M, Hornby G, et al. (2022) *Cancelling special education: Education that dare not speak its name*.
14. Hornby G (2021) Are inclusive education or special education programs more likely to result in inclusion post-school? *Education Sciences* 11(6): 304.
15. Hornby G (2020) *The necessity for coexistence of equity and excellence in inclusive and special education*. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*. Oxford University Press.



This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License
DOI: [10.19080/GJIDD.2022.10.555782](https://doi.org/10.19080/GJIDD.2022.10.555782)

**Your next submission with Juniper Publishers
will reach you the below assets**

- Quality Editorial service
- Swift Peer Review
- Reprints availability
- E-prints Service
- Manuscript Podcast for convenient understanding
- Global attainment for your research
- Manuscript accessibility in different formats
- (Pdf, E-pub, Full Text, Audio)**
- Unceasing customer service

Track the below URL for one-step submission
<https://juniperpublishers.com/online-submission.php>