



AT A GLANCE

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[Belonging and Becoming](#)

[March 2012 Newsletter](#)

Norman Kunc, author, international speaker and Canadian self-advocate helps us understand the need for students to first belong before we can expect them to excel. Students need to feel they belong in order to become all they can be!

Every day, teachers open their classroom doors to students with diverse strengths and needs. There is no prerequisite to belong; show up for school and you belong! Teachers provide engaging lessons with appropriate instruction so every student can actively participate and become valued and respected learners.

Unfortunately, many students who are labeled with disabilities are not welcome in the general education classroom, and they're not seen as competent learners. As an advocate for students, I attend many IEP meetings where the special education staff and/or administrators act as gatekeepers and deny students access to general education in elementary, middle school and high school classrooms.

In some elementary schools, students with disability labels may be allowed to participate in general education "specials:" art, music, P.E., lunch and/or recess. If they are "lucky," they might be allowed to occasionally visit a Science or Social Studies classroom, but they're "placed" in a separate special ed classroom for core academics (reading, writing, and math). At middle schools and high schools, some students with disability labels may be allowed to participate in general ed *electives*, but not core academics.

During IEP meetings, educators frequently ask parents, "What could your child possibly get out of being in a general education class?" Parents are told that their child's academic skills are far below other students, that their child would be a distraction in the general education classroom, and more. (And is it possible a student with a disability label is under-performing academically because he/she has been under-educated in special ed classrooms?)

Do students without disability labels have to meet these same "prerequisites" before they're allowed in a general education class? Are they given permission to belong if they don't have a history of "straight As"? Are they presumed to be "disruptive"?

To ensure students with disability labels belong so they can become all they can be, families and supporters need to be persistent! If what has been tried isn't working, change strategies and keep trying. Continue the conversation with school or district

administrators. Gather support from parents of “typical” students who understand the benefits of all students belonging and becoming together. Ask IEP team members to ensure all children belong so all children can become!

Want more tips on building relationships/resolving strained relationships? Read [3 Rs of Advocacy](#) on my [website](#), [click here](#) to access it. Would you like some statements or questions you can ask in a variety of situations that will help you respond to what you may hear at an IEP meeting? [Click here](#) to read [One-Liners](#), also on my [website](#).

Identify your vision: What does belonging and becoming look and feel like?

Use your voice: to develop classroom communities where all students learn together.

Work together: to ensure there is unconditional membership in general education classes and in our communities.

Take an action step now and email this newsletter to others.



Resources

Rethinking Disability: A Disability Studies Approach to Inclusive Practices
by Jan W. Valle and David J. Conner

Valle and Conner assert that we need to reframe our thinking, instead of examining what is “wrong” with a person with disabilities we need to evaluate how our society disables people.

Check out more recommended books on my website page, [What’s On My Bookshelf](#)



Websites



Paula Kluth’s [website](#) is packed with ideas for educators and families to support inclusive education.



As a parent and an educator, I bring 35+ years of experience and enthusiasm to create positive change for students, families, and educators! How may I support you? Click the links below to learn more.

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Let us share our **Visions** of possibilities and opportunities.
Honor the **Voices** of students, families, and educators,
Choose to work **Together**,

To achieve Educational Success for All!

Would you love to have an easy to read, magazine-like format blog to read? Some of the articles are written by me and others are scooped from a variety of sites. Go to [Beyond Special Education](#), then click on the blue Follow button in the right hand corner.

Gift certificates can be purchased for one or more hours of my educational advocacy support, at only \$60.00 per hour. [Click here](#) to see the Winter Gift Certificate or Blue Swish Gift Certificate.

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Please let me know if you're interested in one of my presentations and/or customized consulting and coaching.

Remember, what we anticipate, determines what we find!

Charmaine Thaner

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