Shannon Simonelli:

Welcome to our next issue of Effective Practice Briefings.

Today we're going to be focusing on inclusive education, and we are speaking with Dr. Susan Bray-Stainback. She's a professor emeritus at the University of Northern Iowa, and she's been in the field for many, many years. She got her doctorate degree in disability studies and educational research from the University of Virginia. She's broadly published and well-respected in the field. So we're delighted to have Susan with us today.

We've also got Dr. Julie Smith who is our curriculum expert in the field.

I'm Dr. Shannon Simonelli. I'm with the Center on Disability Studies and am serving as your host and moderator for this project which is funded by the Hawaii State Improvement Grant.

So I'd like to welcome both our speakers and turn it over to Julie to begin with the first question.

Julie: [2:10]

Good morning, Shannon and Susan. Susan, you have been in the field for a very long time. I know from reading your publications and working with you in the past, that you've really been at the forefront of the inclusive education movement since its inception back in '75 when public law 94142 was passed. I'd like for you to speak just a little bit about how you found yourself on this journey, and how you arrived at the conclusion that the way to begin and maintain was to do it in an inclusive way.

Susan: [2:53]

Where I actually began in my undergraduate work was in psychology. This is kind of a bizarre start because they said I'm secondary psychology, and they said I didn't look old enough to teach in high school. So they put me in elementary school and special education. Well, I got to know the kids, and we pretty much enjoyed each other.

So I decided to go back to school. I did it part time, of course. I was teaching a couple of years, and then I went back full-time. During the process of that, I was introduced to a number of the disability areas. Back at that time, you focused on one, and you became a specialist in one. I recognized very quickly, because I took classes across the board, that we were talking about the same things in most of the classes. So I kind of recognized that differences are differences. So whenever I did any work, I tended to apply the same things no matter what labels the child had. You know, there's differences in kids, but you know, there's differences in every kid. It doesn't make any difference.

I went ahead and finished my degree, and I started working in a situation where I spent some time going down to an institution. Most of the children in this institution didn't have any schooling at all. They weren't provided any educational opportunity. I was pretty appalled by that because even though they said some of these people

just can’t learn anything, they introduced me to one young man. They said he is totally unaware of everything. He has no recognition of anything. Basically what he was doing was spending his day having the people in the ward running and getting his things, because he’d throw them, and if they didn’t get them he’d scream. He had total control of all the people in the ward, and they said he couldn’t learn anything. So obviously, he could. From there, I got to interacting with the residents and recognized that they were anxious to learn. Some of them couldn’t see; some of them couldn’t hear; many couldn’t talk. But they enjoyed the attention and the opportunity to gain some skill in something.

So I started working on a project with several people at the University of Northern Iowa that was designed to provide education for all children — for kids that, at that time, they were called “severely and profoundly handicapped.” We started on this project and were in a teacher education kind of mode and went around to different parts of the state and met with different educators and discussed and worked out ways to address the needs of these people who most people considered didn’t need an education. At that time, that was back in ’74, and P.L.94-142 wasn’t even passed at the time. Fortunately, it passed shortly after that. Then it gained momentum. Then we became pretty popular because nobody else had done it, so everybody else said, “Hey, you’re kind of working on it.” We found out we had to do this, so we got in to that.

We, of course, had segregated classes and we also worked in many of the segregated schools. There were schools set up — some of the schools were already set up. There was one in the area that was for kids that were, at that time, called “trainable,” I think. Something like that, or “severely handicapped” or something. So we worked in segregated schools, and of course the kids in the institutions were in segregated classrooms, but at least they were in a classroom and were given opportunities to learn.

I quickly found out that when you put children together that have the same characteristics, especially if they’re ones that you don't want to foster, everybody else learns that characteristic. For instance, let’s go positive. If you have five children, a teacher, and a full-time aide in a classroom, the teacher and the aide can’t be with all the children all the time. Who are these kids going to learn from? Who do they interact with? They interact with their peers, and none of their peers can talk. So by default they were being denied the opportunity to spend time with people who could talk that could encourage them and give them the motivation to talk.

There was a tendency that if one individual decided to bang their head and everybody ran and paid attention, well the next one would do it too. And the next person will do it. It’s learning either appropriate or inappropriate behaviors from your peers. If you’re in with people who are not exhibiting behaviors that you want the children to learn, then probabilities are very low that they’re going to very quickly learn them. So from that I wanted to get people out of special school so at least they could be in regular schools where they could see other children, and in the playground at least interact.

Then I realized these kids were still considered strange. They had a natural barrier, even though there wasn't a physical barrier. Then I recognized that they needed to be in regular classrooms, with other people. From there, which was kind of the concept of mainstreaming, which means letting people in, or integration, letting them in.

I could see that wasn't good enough. I was out in a classroom in California. I went in, and there were two Asian children sitting over on the side. I always talk to the kids to find out what's going on. So I'm in the back of the room and I said, "Why are those kids over there?" And he said, "They don't speak English, so they just impede our learning, so the teacher just gives them something to color over there, and they'll stay out of our way." So obviously that was not the concept. They were integrated; they were mainstreamed, but that was certainly not the idea.

Julie: [10:53]

You know, I think we still see a fair amount of that kind of set-up happening where kids that have disabilities being in the general ed classroom, physically being in that environment, but not exactly participating with their peers. It's more of a parallel thing that happens in the classroom. In some cases I hear that called inclusive, that they're physically there, but they've got the table in the back of the room and they've got an EA or somebody, you know, maybe a special ed teacher, that's back there that's kind of running a parallel curriculum, or is tutoring curriculum kind of as they go along for just those students back there. I kind of wanted to get your take on if that is what you considered to be an inclusive approach.

Susan: [11:44]

Well, not at all. But I think it is perpetuated even today by the government in that the U.S. Department of Education in the special education program area has an access center. It's called Access, and it provides a number of different teaching procedures and techniques that deal with individual differences. But Access is, again, the stack like ??? 12:08 mainstreaming or integration. It's getting them in.

Inclusion is really the idea. It's really something that we want for everybody. It's the same thing we want for our family members. And basically it involves the idea that every student is welcome. Not just allowed in. They're actually welcome; they're supported; they have respect; there's a process of cooperation among all of them. The real difference is that it's a value. It's not a …

Julie: [12:56]

Strategy?

Susan:

Excuse me?

Julie:

Are you saying it's not a strategy.

Susan: [13:04]

No. It’s not a strategy at all.

Julie:

Correct.

Susan: [13:07]

It’s a value. I’m sure, how the way a lot of people have heard of the book Everything I Know I Learned in Kindergarten. Well, you can learn this in kindergarten. You don’t force one of the children out and don’t let them in. You know, if somebody’s having trouble, you help them. You don’t think less of them because they’re shorter or they don’t talk as well. You help them. That’s inclusion. Everybody’s a part of the whole. They’re not just a member, allowed access for coming in. It’s a whole different concept.

Julie: [13:49]

Right. But it would include things like access to the general ed curriculum and so on, because if they’re going to be embraced and welcomed in to this general ed environment and community of learners, then access is naturally a part of that.

Susan: [14:12]

Access is a part. But it’s not what we’re shooting for. I mean, we are shooting for it. You have to have access, and you have to be allowed in the environment in order for the other to take place. Because for the family member to be accepted, they have to be in the family. They can't be sent off somewhere else and never interact with them.

Shannon: [15:18]

One of the things that I was hearing in what you were saying, Susan, is that it’s not just about access. And correct me if I’m misunderstanding this. It’s not just about access, that it’s really about really truly having an attitude of inclusion, that that’s where your value is, and that that’s more the emphasis or the underpinning of what it is that you’re working towards.

Susan: [15:41]

Yes, that everybody is an equal part of a whole. No one is any different. Everybody is considered different. Everybody is admired for their difference. Or they learn from the differences that each person has. But they’re not something bad. Everybody is equally worthy, an equally desirable member.

Julie: [16:04]

And I think one of the things that I’ve shared with you, Susan, in the past, is kind of the perception that disability is part of the issue of diversity, simply that disability is part of the natural landscape of human diversity, and that one of the bigger barriers

that we have to inclusive education actually working the way that you had conceived it to work, and where it does work in some places, is that we, many times still hold an attitude that these children are somehow less than, or they're going to detract from other students in their classroom. In my work, I'm still seeing some attitudes,-- not that they're intended to be negative,-- but that the perception of these children of being less capable and drawing the energy out of the rest of the classroom as one of the barriers that we encounter in terms of really facilitating and supporting inclusive education..

Susan: [17:14]

There are two things, and I kind of see them a little different.

One is you're dealing with the concept of "them and us." It's a universal phenomena: It exists in politics, economy, cultures, religion, education; it's in everything; it's multi-faceted. It's about race, learning ability, gender, religion, physical characteristic, age. Whenever we have people who are separated that have a particular characteristic, the general population who have never had an opportunity to interact with an individual with that difference naturally has fear. They don't understand it. It's like fear of the unknown. You've seen people get aggressive and even taunt people. It's simply because they're being defensive because they don't understand.

We are still in a situation where most of the adults, not only in education, but the parents and in the community, grew up in situations where many children were taught in special classes, taught in special schools, or not taught at all. And that's how they were brought up. Despite the fact that cognitively they may kind of understand the concept, they still see people with the characteristic they haven't interacted with as "them" and not "us".

That's really the purpose of inclusion: to recognize everybody as us.

Shannon: [19:12]

That's really beautiful.

Julie: [19:15]

That makes sense. And you're talking about doing this right away in kindergarten and so on. One of the things, and I don't want to put you on the spot about anything, but I'm thinking about kindergarten classrooms. I spend a fair amount of time in those kinds of classrooms. Can you suggest, or think of, any kinds of specific things that teachers can do to really facilitate breaking down that perception of "them and us", and really supporting a community of learners where everyone is very valued, because I agree. At those very young ages, kids haven't become jaded, haven't developed those stereotypes quite as solidly as kids that are older. But do you have anything specific in mind that teachers might be able to take from this interview where they might be able to actually go back to their classrooms and say, "Oh. I want to try this."

Susan: [20:14]

Yes. Well, I think in terms of inclusion, there are no set rules or methods.It's a philosophy or tenet.

Julie: [20:24]

And we don't have recipes for ideals and philosophies. I understand that.

Susan: [20:28]

But if you do certain things, it increases the probability that the school, the classroom, will operate in an inclusive way.

One is, there should be a philosophy of the school, as well as the classroom, to continually try to make it clear in their activities that every member of the school is treated with dignity and respect, and that they're welcomed and they belong. There aren't some members of the school that are elevated above other members. Every member of the school will consider desirable and valued.

You can do that by not having, like in high school, sometimes if certain sports are emphasized, those students get special consideration, special recognition, that kind of thing, and are held above the other people and get rights that other people don't have. Well, that's just one example.

I feel gifted education is kind of that way. When you separate some kids out and say, 'Oh, they're smarter than everybody else, so we're going to put them over here, and they can do a lot of stuff that the other kids can't do." Then we have resources that the other kids can't get.

I think the second thing you have to do is set up the situation so there's reciprocal support among all the school members. When you start into inclusion, it's not just with the kids. It's with the teachers; it's with the administrators; it's with the parents; it's everybody in the school community, because we want it to radiate out. We want it to be a part of our life.

So we need to start recognizing that all school members need support. Teachers need support, too.

Julie: [22:59]

They do.

Susan: [23:02]

The other thing I think is important is that every member can be both a provider of support and a receiver of support. There's not some people that give support and other people that get it.

Julie: [23:18]

Even though our areas may be in different, … supports may be in different areas, that everyone is able and probably willing to provide support to others, yeah?

Susan: [23:31]

I saw an activity in a third-grade classroom. There was a child in there who couldn't talk and who basically used eye movements to communicate. It was like a directory. In that directory, they put every child's name, and by their name what they can do to help other children. So if there was a kid that's really good at math, note that down. If there was a kid who knows about cats, that was put down. Next to this person's name is: "If you feel sad, she'll make you feel better." And that was a consensus from the kids, because the kids were involved in saying what each child could contribute. And that was what the consensus of the kids was: "Whenever I feel bad, I go talk to ----."

And so it's getting the kids to recognize everybody's strengths. It also recognizes that none of us are good at everything. WE all need help.

Julie: [24:53]

I've actually seen that kind of activity play out in newsletters that kids write, and they work on language arts standards in there. They publish this little newsletter thing with the little ad: 'if you ever need help with such-and-such, then you contact so-and-so." I've seen it come out in that kind of publication form at about the third or fourth grade, I've seen that happen. It's a really neat idea.

Susan: [25:20]

The other aspect of that reciprocal support is that neither the kids, nor teachers or administrators, ever have to fear that they're going to fail, or that they're isolated or ridiculed for not being able to do something, because every success is shared. It's shared because everybody helps each other. So they gain confidence. Every kid can gain confidence and self-respect, as well as being able to assist one another.

Shannon: [25:52]

That's wonderful. I think I'm going to let that be our last word for this little period of time. We'll take a short break and let our listeners integrate that. And we'll be back in just a moment.