Foreword
Values, Logical Practices, and Research:
The Three Musketeers of Effective Education

Michael F. Giangreco, Ph.D.

The motto of the Three Musketeers is legendary: "All for one and one for all!" The result of their unity was triumph! To triumph in the realm of meaningful and effective education, we, too, need to rely on an inseparable triumvirate: values, logical practices, and research. The order in which this trio is presented is purposeful. Effective education begins with values and proceeds to logical practices. Research informs the selection of our logical practices and helps us determine their effectiveness and impact.

SOCIETAL VALUES

Educating our children begins with what we value. Without an affirmative value orientation upon which to base our practices and research, they are at best haphazard, and at worst, dangerous. At the broadest level, I am referring to values deeply embedded in our national ethos. These values are the kind most people would agree with regardless of their political persuasion or educational philosophy, such as those articulated by our nation's founders as "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Although no one is guaranteed his or her version of the "American Dream," as a society we purport to provide equal access to it. We espouse that everyone should have the opportunity to pursue his or her dreams and be included in community life, free of undue restrictions on personal liberties. These are values we aspire to but which still elude too many Americans—especially those with disabilities.

Historically, people with disabilities have been on the receiving end of many practices based on restrictive and exclusionary values, often under the guise of "helping." We now recognize these practices as interfering with the pursuit of living a "regular life" in the community. People with disabilities have been, and continue to be, institutionalized, sterilized, segregated, subjected to aversive procedures, denied access to medical treatment, devalued, and discriminated against in virtually every aspect of community life. These practices are now widely recognized as inconsistent with what our society claims to value. It has taken us a long time to own up to this realization—we still have quite a way to go to set things right.

Despite the slow pace of change, we are headed on a path in pursuit of values that affirm the inclusion, participation, self-determination, and support of people with disabilities in education, employment, community living, and recreation. These are values that, when put into practice, are good for people with disabilities, good for their families, and good for our communities and society as a whole. Like a canary in a mineshaft, how a society treats its citizens with disabilities can be an indicator of its overall health.

Our national values, at least in part, are reflected in our federal laws. Within the realm of education, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997, PL 105-17, support access to a meaningful life in the community by ensuring that *all* children with disabilities receive a free, appropriate public education. IDEA emphasizes access to general education settings and curriculum, as well as opportunities for students with disabilities to be educated with peers who do not have disabilities. IDEA affirms the belief that all children can learn when provided with appropriately individualized curriculum, instruction, and supports. Further, it includes safeguards to avoid unduly restrictive placements and practices. Of course, IDEA reflects an ideal that is not always played out in reality.

VALUED LIFE OUTCOMES

For most people with disabilities and their families and friends, the lofty rhetoric of society's values is distant and somewhat removed from the joys and struggles of daily life. On an individual level, these broader societal values are played out in more practical terms. The following valued life outcomes are neither surprising nor are they unique to people with disabilities. Self-advocates and their families tell us that they value people, practices, and supports that allow them to

- Be safe and healthy
- Develop meaningful relationships with other people
- Have choice and control within their lives
- Engage in meaningful activities (e.g., employment, recreation, education)
- Participate in the full range of places available to other citizens
- Have a home in which to live, now and in the future

These valued life outcomes, as well as others, can be pursued through a combination of skill development on the part of the person with a disability and supports provided to that person. Most of us have come to expect that we will have opportunities to pursue our interests and aspirations in ways that we find personally satisfying and that hold potential to be of value to the broader community. Too many people with disabilities and their families wage a battle to attain the same opportunities many of us take for granted.

LOGICAL PRACTICES

Bridging the gap between values and reality requires the development and utilization of practices that logically lead to the realization of those values. In this context, logical practices refer to actions taken to educate our students that *make sense*. For example, if we want a student with a disability to learn how to interact with peers who do not have disabilities, it is logical to provide ongoing opportunities for these students to be together and participate in shared activities. If we want a student to learn an important skill, it is logical to explicitly teach that skill, provide repeated opportunities to practice and apply that skill, and provide ways for the student to get feedback on his learning. If we want a student to learn to make reasonable choices, it is logical to provide a range of reasonable options, teach the student communication skills that allow her to indicate her choices, and then honor the choices she makes.

ILLOGICAL PRACTICES

In too many places in our country we find ourselves in a sort of educational "twilight zone." While more people are espousing inclusive values about educating students with disabilities, our practices reflect an odd mixture of the old and the new. Much of our "politically correct" rhetoric is without substance. Our hybrid practices are not as successful as they could be because too many of them are consistent with values from a past era. As a result, we see *illogical practices*.

If we want a student with challenging behaviors to have positive models of appropriate behaviors, it is illogical to place him in a classroom where he will only interact with other students who exhibit a range of challenging behaviors. If we want students to learn how to treat others fairly and with kindness, it is illogical to use classroom management methods that are based on humiliation, threats, or punishment. If we want a middle school student to have opportunities to make friends with classmates, it is illogical to teach her recreational activities meant for much younger children. If we want students to lead regular lives, it is illogical to make everything we do with and for them "specialized" and "disability different." We desperately need to rely on logical practices that are congruent with the valued life outcomes sought by people with disabilities and their families.

PURSUING LOGICAL PRACTICES REQUIRES CREATIVITY

In pursuing actions that make sense, there is a danger that the pursuit of "logical practices" might be interpreted too narrowly. Some people might limit what makes sense only to what is rather than what could be. For example, some people might think it does not make sense to include a student with severe disabilities in an academic class where the vast majority of other students are working on objectives that are different or more advanced. It is not uncommon to hear a teacher say, "I don't get it! How does it make sense to include a student with severe disabilities in my class?"

Limiting ourselves to what is restricts the boundaries of our thinking. These artificial limitations have led us to wrongly assume that

- All students in the same class must have the same learning outcomes
- The format of a class (e.g., lecture) must stay the same
- All students must be evaluated in the same ways

Reexamining practices that might appear illogical when viewed from a "what is" perspective can actually provide fertile ground for creative problem-solving when we approach them as "what if" situations. In fact, when we challenge our existing practices in an effort to include students with disabilities, invariably we identify changes that improve educational practices for many other students who do not have disabilities, often by making instruction more individualized, participatory, and cooperative.

RESEARCH

Where does educational research fit into an approach that begins with values and proceeds to logical practices? Within this framework, educational research serves at least two important purposes. First, descriptive research can help us deepen

our understanding, reframe our questions, challenge our thinking, and extend our insights. Second, educational research is well-suited to helping us evaluate our practices to determine the extent of their effectiveness and impact on desired outcomes. Both of these purposes can inform our selection, development, and utilization of logical practices that match valued life outcomes sought by students with disabilities and their families.

It is important to recognize and distinguish between helpful and unhelpful research. Helpful research aids us in better understanding or pursuing valued life outcomes for students who have disabilities. Unhelpful research offers trivial findings, interferes with innovation, or hinders efforts to advance valued life outcomes for students with disabilities. Sometimes unhelpful research unnecessarily or artificially pits two or more valued outcomes against each other by suggesting that one can be pursued but only at the expense of another. Helpful research has resulted in more students with severe disabilities acquiring and applying skills resulting in improvements in valued life outcomes that would not have been considered priorities or possibilities 10 or 20 years ago.

Few issues in special education are more contentiously debated than the inclusion of students with the full range of disabilities in general education classes. Some people ask, "Where is the research supporting the inclusion of students with disabilities within general education?" Whether the inclusion of students with disabilities within general education should be supported at the level of social policy and school-based practice is not a question for research to answer—it is a question of values.

It would be more helpful to pose research questions that help us to clarify and to advance valued outcomes.

- How do students with disabilities and their families experience and think about inclusion and exclusion?
- How can we successfully include a wider range of students with disabilities in general education classes?
- What curricular and instructional approaches are effective for teaching heterogeneous groups of students who may be pursuing different learning outcomes?
- How can schools and classrooms be organized to account for greater student diversity?
- What are barriers to effective inclusion, and how can they be overcome?
- How can school personnel be supported to successfully teach students with and without disabilities?

LOCAL RESEARCH

When people talk about research, they usually mean the kind they read in journals. Typically, this is research carried out somewhere else, by someone else, with someone else's students. Although such research can be very useful, how we think about research need not be limited to articles in journals.

There is an old saying, "All politics are local." In much the same way, I would like to suggest that "All research is local." Although it is helpful to know that a practice has been successful elsewhere, ultimately, when relying on research to make decisions about whether a particular practice makes sense, the decision is a local one.

Just because something is published in a journal does not mean it makes sense in your situation. Conversely, just because research is lacking does not mean a practice that makes sense to an educational team should not be attempted. Do not be held back by the age-old conundrum, "We can't implement an innovative practice because we don't have enough research supporting it. Yet, we don't have enough research because not enough people are implementing it." What matters is whether the practices under consideration make sense for the specific students for whom their use is proposed. Once team members have decided that a proposed practice is logical and is consistent with the valued life outcomes being sought, they have enough reason to move forward with initial implementation.

At this point, educational team members become researchers to study the effectiveness and impact of the practices locally to see if they are helping to effectively achieve desired outcomes for their students. This means establishing important questions and developing valid systems to answer them.

In other words, to be accountable for our decisions about practices that we utilize, we have to collect and analyze data to determine if students are achieving reasonably established objectives. Second, we must extend our evaluation of impact in an attempt to ascertain whether achievement has resulted in strides toward valued life outcomes. For example, having a student learn social skills is commendable, but ultimately, these skills are only useful if they result in the development or enhancement of personally meaningful relationships with other people.

SEQUENCE AND SYNERGY

Espousing inclusion's values without implementing logical practices and learning from research is of little consequence and is unlikely to yield positive results. Implementation of practices without values leads to misuse and abuse. Segregation and use of aversive procedures are two prime examples. Values and logical practices without research leave us with too many unanswered questions about effectiveness and impact. But used together, values, logical practices, and research can have a positive and synergistic effect on education and the lives of students with disabilities.

In this book, June E. Downing and her colleagues present a wide array of logical practices that are firmly based on inclusionary values and research. Our challenge as a field is to create the conditions (e.g., class size, caseload size, proportion of students with special needs, personnel preparation and support) that allow teams to implement these and other innovative practices. Downing's practical and value-based insights into including students with severe and multiple disabilities present "what is" for a small portion of students with severe disabilities and the promise of "what could be" for many others. She accomplishes this important task by relying on the synergy of values, logical practices, and research—the Three Musketeers of meaningful and effective education.

Michael F. Giangreco, Ph.D.
University of Vermont
Center on Disability and Community Inclusion