Introduction

I was teaching a course last summer at the University of British Columbia called "Conceptual Foundations of Inclusive Education." Thirty or so practising teachers from various subject areas, knowledge expertise, and experience levels from across British Columbia joined me for three weeks of deconstruction, inquiry, and reflection, creating an engaging community of learners. The course was in July, and on this particular day, it was my birthday. We started the class with some cupcakes and hung up "Happy Birthday" bunting across the whiteboard, before diving into our explorations and understanding of the concept driving learning systems all over the world – inclusive education.

I showed a slide to my students with four bubbles (see figure 1.1, page 2). Their job was to label the bubbles with the appropriate terms (*inclusion, integration, exclusion,* and *segregation*) based on their own experiences and prior knowledge of the concepts.

After some discussion, it was agreed that Bubble C in fact represented inclusion (see figure 1.2, page 3). This is the common consensus arrived at in many groups I have worked with, both in pre- and in-service professional development settings.

After some discussion, however, a student commented, "Shelley, I don't think this diagram is inclusion, either." This caught me off guard.

"Of course this is inclusion!" I thought. I had shown this slide to hundreds if not thousands of people! What could she possibly mean?
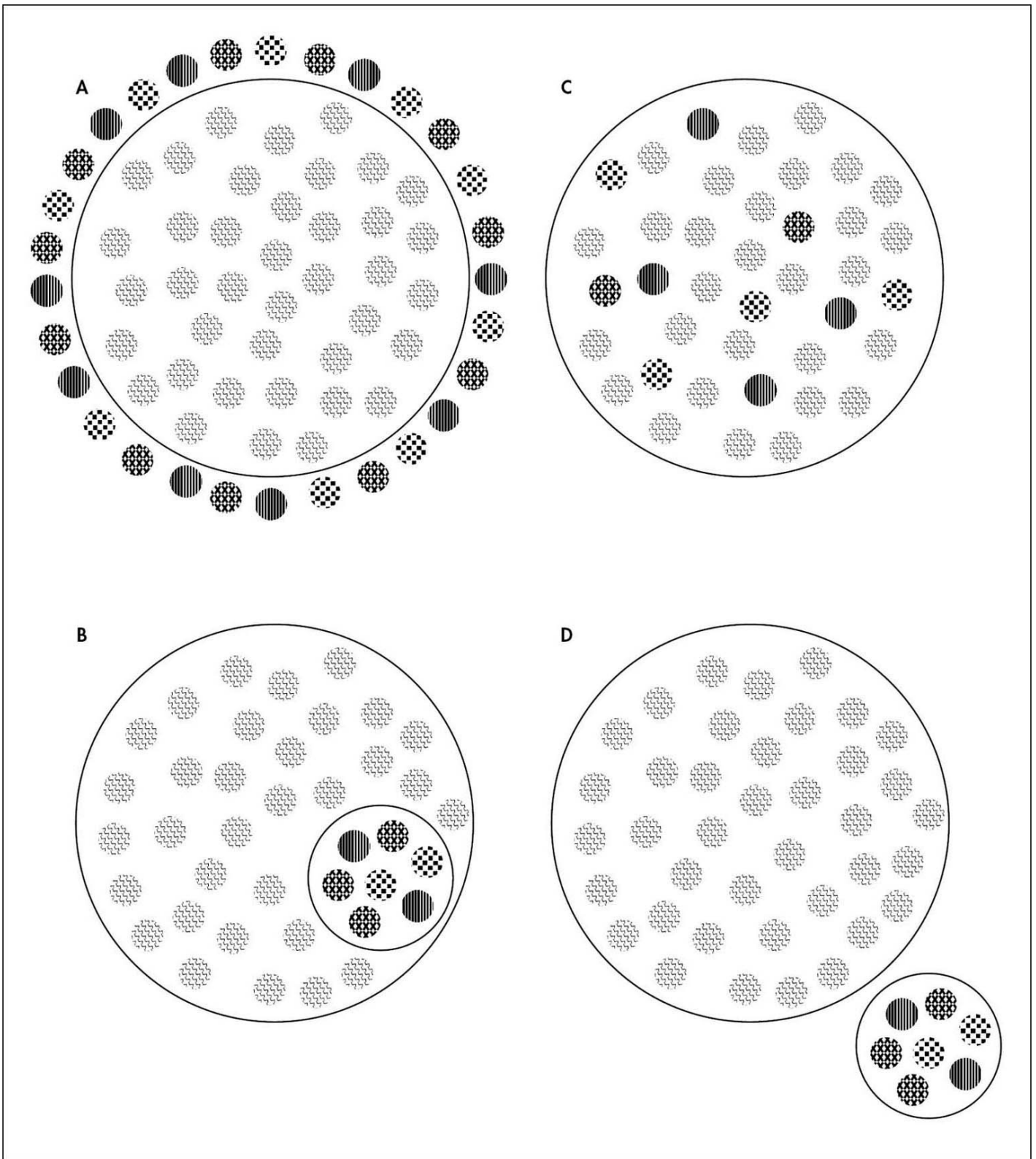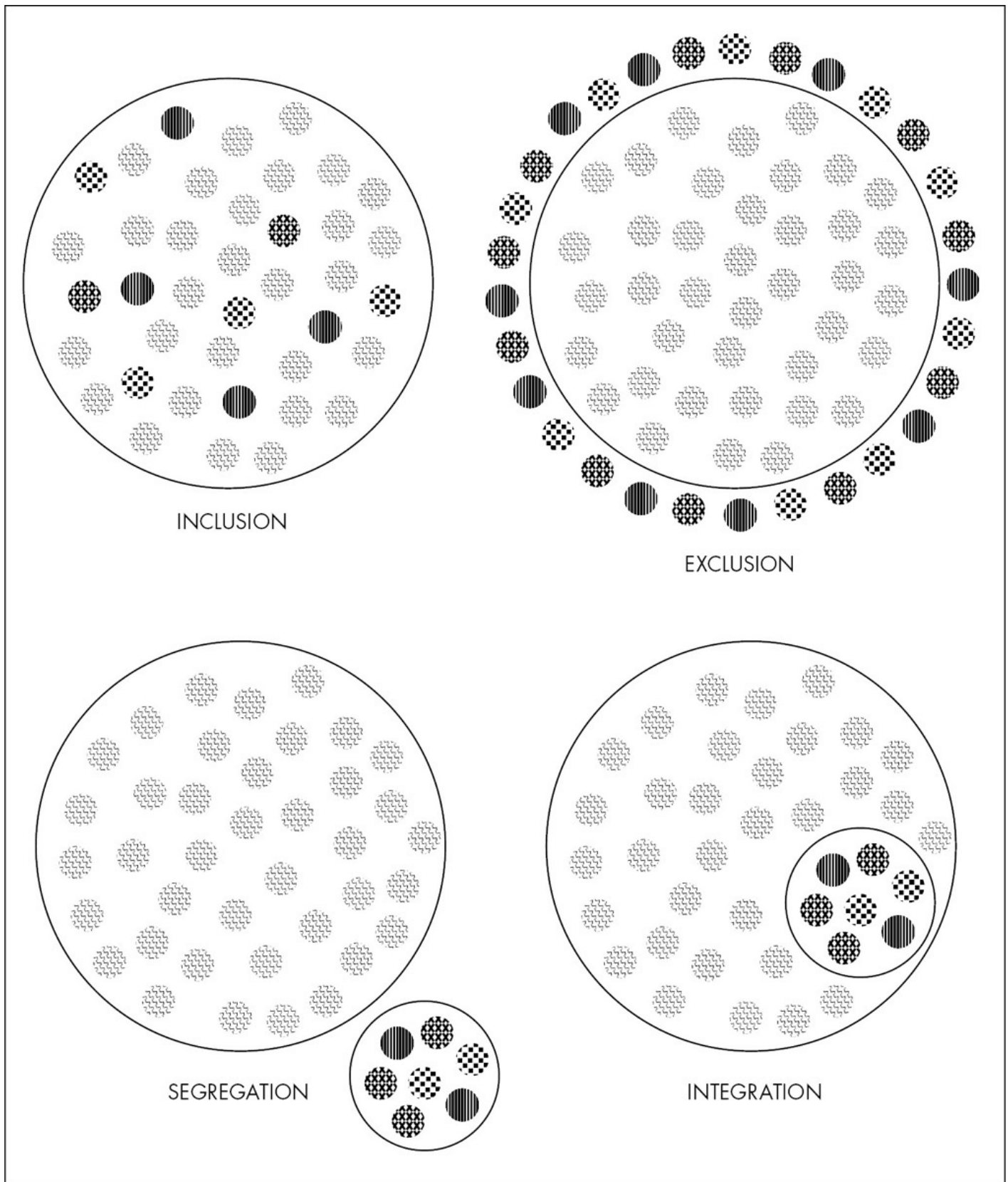
Figure 1.1

Figure 1.2

She explained, "Look what you have shown us. I see a bubble with a whole bunch of wavy dots. And then, there are a scattered handful of other patterned dots."

"Yeah," I said, "and…."

"Well, in my definition of inclusion, there is no *other.*"

I stood there speechless, because she was absolutely right. The diagram I was presenting was not one of inclusion; it was an example of the traditional model of education. The model where our goal is to produce more of the same – lingering evidence of the factory model of education where we needed to produce and replicate people to meet the demand of the workforce during the industrial revolution (Robinson 2009; Zhao 2009). A model where our job as educators (and especially special educators) is to identify students who aren't wavy, and fix them. Send the checkered kids to the checkered teacher, the diamond kids to the diamond teacher, and the striped kids to the striped teacher. This model of education is a deficit, medical model, and I was showing the class a perfect example of how it was still plaguing us today. But more and more kids are coming to us not wavy! Not only is this model less effective, but also we are running out of funding, supports, and students to allow this model to continue. Some have met this shift in paradigm with panic; others are seeing it as an opportunity. This paradigm shift, however, is long overdue, and we need to start matching our goals of education to the goals and expectations needed to meet the current demands of our society – which no longer wants people to simply comply. This is especially true now, as more and more occupations involving compliance and replication are being replaced by machines (Zhao 2009).

Educational reforms are happening on a global scale, including in British Columbia and other provinces in Canada, where the Ministries of Education are completely restructuring their curricula, being designed and written by teachers for teachers, with the emphasis on moving away from classrooms of wavy students (BC Ministry of Education 2015). We are no longer living in the Industrial Revolution; this is the 21st century – where we need to value the strengths rather than deficits in learning. Rather than finding out why students aren't wavy, our job is now to find out what their pattern is. What do they bring? What can they contribute *because* of their diverse and unique expertise? For decades we have been trying to take this "pattern" out of our students, taking the special out of special education, the autistic out of autism, the language out of cultures, and, especially, the Indigenous out of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children. This is not teaching to diversity. This is not inclusive. Teaching to diversity and inclusion is where we value the characteristics that *are* diverse, and not try and homogenize them.

The class continued to discuss what the conceptual diagram of inclusion could be, and together we decided that the only way to ensure there was no "other" was not to make us all wavy, but instead to make us all "an other" (see figure 1.3).
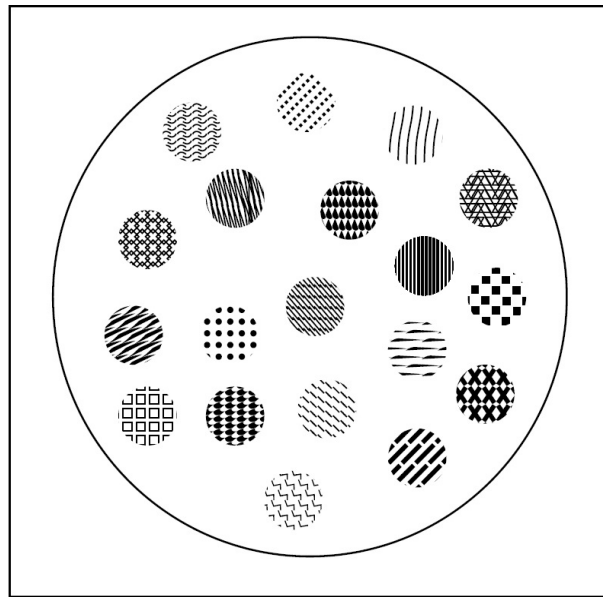
Figure 1.3

When looking at inclusion this way, it also helped us realize that this is no longer an idea specific to special education. There is a distinct gap between the silos of special education and curriculum (Pugach and Warger 2001; Thomas and Loxley 2007), but if we look at inclusion as a concept of teaching to the diversity of all, rather than just a special-education initiative, we can bridge this gap. We are diverse, all of us. We all have strengths, we all have stretches, and we all need to get better at something. The difference in teaching to diversity, however, is that we don't start with our deficits; we start with our strengths, and this includes students, teachers, support staff, custodians, bus drivers, and parents. My good friend Leyton Schnellert refers to this collective as "the ecology of learning communities." Inclusive education relies on the diversity of its ecosystem to not only promote coexistence and tolerance, but to thrive on the learning and interaction of each person in the community

Through this discussion, I also realized that if we can now extend inclusive education to include every diverse learner, then we can also start to view inclusion as not something we simply do; instead, it becomes something that just *is*. We cannot escape or avoid the diversity in our world by attempting to homogenize and standardize our classrooms and learners. Homogeneity is a battle that has never been won and never will be. Civilizations have collapsed in their attempts to make everyone the same (Morris 2013). This is no longer our vision of education (thank goodness), and we are long overdue in matching our vision to our practices in classrooms, schools, and communities.

It was also on this particular day that I was inspired to write this book, because it was on this day I realized that if inclusion and diversity is something that just *is,* then it is also something we live, something we are, and something we believe in together. And it is through this common goal that we can also be unified: we can be *one* without being an *other*.

So, please allow me to introduce to you "*One* without the *Other*."

PART 1
What Is Inclusion? Debunking the Myths

You may be hard-pressed to find someone who doesn't believe in inclusion and the values of diversity on some level. Plus, it is pretty hard to avoid. Ken Robinson (2009) said it best: "The only thing students have in common is the year of their birth!" The individuals of the world are not packaged into neat little packages of people organized by age or ability, gender, or language (although I suppose there are some who would like to try!). Can you imagine if, when we walked into a grocery store, access to checkout tills were determined by these labels? It would be an absurd idea in every place in society, except in the classrooms of our schools. This unnatural arrangement is where the practical aspects of inclusion get messy, definitions of the concept start to get fuzzy, and our practices become a mismatch to our beliefs about what inclusion means in the world outside our classroom doors. It doesn't take long to notice how frequently we all, even if in the same school or community, understand inclusion differently.

Early in my career, I realized this discrepancy, and it caused tensions in my quest to understand inclusion in both philosophical and practical terms. My first question was: If we are to believe in and try to move forward in our inclusive practice as educators, don't we all need to have a common understanding of what it means? The unfortunate reality, however, is that the term *inclusion* has become contaminated (Thomas and Loxley 2007). A once-powerful word that drove equal access campaigns for students of different abilities, strengths, and challenges, the term *inclusion* has instead come to be associated with lack of funding, time, and supports – a political playing card that has turned our most vulnerable learners into a burden, defined by ratios and deficits. Further tension emerges when trying to create a consensus of how to enact practices of inclusion across districts, schools, and classrooms, leaving both teachers and students feeling like they are being shuffled around a building without the supports, resources, and understanding behind the inclusive rationale. The reality, however, is that there is no answer. There is no one way of being inclusive. Addressing diversity can be achieved in many ways, depending on the history, experience, knowledge, and philosophies of the stakeholders involved. Somewhere along this quest, however, answers have collided, and where once stood a common philosophy bringing educators together, myths and assumptions have formed about the practicalities of inclusive education that divide staff, parents, and students alike.

Reclaiming the word and concept of inclusive education and calibrating our definitions among teachers, administrators, support staff, parents, and students was the beginning of my inclusive journey, and so, I thought, what a perfect place to begin this text. What is inclusion – both philosophically *and* practically? And how can we align these definitions so that our practices better match our beliefs as individuals, schools, and communities of natural

diversity? Part of this reclamation is to simply debunk some of the myths driving the education silos, but also to start to reconstruct the practical realities of inclusive education.

In the following chapters, I attempt to describe these practical implications of inclusive education to help situate the rest of this text and to connect our values of inclusion to our everyday practices.

1

Inclusion Is Not Just About Students with Special Needs

When I began teaching, my first position was in a co-taught grade 4/5 classroom. I was a special educator in a beautiful school in Bronx, N.Y., teaming up with an amazing local – who could both charm and straighten out kids (and me) in a fraction of a second with a simple glance in their (or my) direction. Given the context, the school was also placed with the unfair burden of trying to negotiate additional factors, such as poverty, hunger, crime, and the general health and well-being of students and families, who were struggling to exist in a world not built to support them. It was here, however, that I also found what loyalty, compassion, and family meant, in a forgotten neighbourhood that I will never forget. I forged friendships and learned lessons for a lifetime there, and will always be grateful for the welcome and belonging I felt in this wonderful community.

On finishing my undergraduate degree in special education, I was skeptical of inclusion. I couldn't help wondering if the learning of tolerance for the "other" kids was a strong enough reason for kids to be forced together, simply breathing the same air, at the expense of explicit instruction for students who needed it the most. "Inclusion for the sake of inclusion" is what I called it, and for me, it wasn't a good enough reason. Well, it took me two days of teaching in the Bronx for me to realize how my understanding of the practice of inclusive education was inaccurate. Inclusion wasn't about tolerance, it was about celebration! I learned the value of collaboration, multiple expertise, and the rich benefits of cultural diversity in an inclusive framework that I had previously and mistakenly understood as a framework supporting an expert model – where I thought I knew everything, and my job was to bestow my gifts of knowledge onto students and staff alike. This transmissive approach (Miller 2007) to learning did not get me far, and if I was to survive, I needed to adapt to inclusion, diversity, and collaboration quickly!

My two years in New York set me straight, as New York does, and when arriving back to Canada to complete my Masters, I had a new understanding of inclusive philosophy and the experience to back it up.

However, if New York taught me about the richness in diversity, McNair Secondary, my second teaching position, taught me about the beauty of acceptance. For the next seven years, I settled into this secondary school in Richmond, British Columbia, where I found my new home teaching students with developmental disabilities in grades 8–12. In New York, similar to many districts and schools, students with the most significant disabilities are still not included in classrooms with their peers, and are often sent to segregated schools, classrooms, or programs (Pugach and Warger 2001). Even in the literature and research, inclusive

education practice and strategies are most visible when supporting students with high incidence disabilities, such as learning disabilities, high-functioning autism, at-risk behaviour, certain mental-health difficulties, and so on (Downing 2008; Katims 2000).

With a three-decade-strong inclusion philosophy, the Richmond School District prides itself on neighbourhood schools where students of all ability belong. From the ripe ages of three and four, students who traditionally have been segregated because of their ability, instead learn alongside their peers in classrooms. By the time they get to grade 8, all kids are part of cohorts that grow up together, go to birthday parties together, eat lunch together, and give each other high fives down the hallway. There are no "those kids" or "that classroom." Kids are kids, and I saw it every day in the halls of my new school. This was not tolerance – this was acceptance.

Inclusion means everyone – but *actually* everyone, even our students who need the most support in our classrooms, schools, and communities. If New York taught me about cultural and language diversity, Richmond taught me about the importance of the diversity of ability. But both places taught me that *all* diversities need to be considered and celebrated. Inclusion is not just about students with special needs, it is about *all* students, and before we can even begin to align philosophy with practice, and shift our deficit-based education paradigm to a strength-based model, we need to understand this essential condition.

2

Inclusion Is Not Integration

To understand what inclusion is, we also have to understand what it isn't. Part of the reason *inclusion* as a term has been contaminated is that it is used synonymously with the word *integration.* Likewise, although I have never stepped into a school whose mission statement values segregation and exclusion, I have seen, in many schools, students experiencing all of exclusion, segregation, integration, and inclusion depending on the day, time, teacher, support staff, subject area, and grade (see Introduction, figure 1.1).

To understand these terms better, let's look back to periods in history that we associate these words with. What events come to mind, for example, when you read the words *integration* and *segregation?* Many may recall the civil rights movement of the 1960s, apartheid, residential schools for First Nations children, or the Nazi occupation of World War II. These are definitely not times associated with communities of learning and the celebration of diversity! What all these events have in common, however, is that they involved forced movement of groups of people – who had no choice. They were either separated or brought together, sharing space – breathing the same air.

Now, we don't have to go back in time to see this happening every day. On a much less traumatic scale, we can say that education systems in general are integration. We force kids to come to school every day. School buildings and classrooms are just containers holding different groups of people, and without facilitation and explicit attention of teaching skills, students and staff alike will naturally gravitate to contexts that are familiar and safe, whether arranged into groups by themselves or by others (Benard 1991; Gibbs 2006; Thomas and Loxley 2007). Just go to the nearest high school to see this phenomenon in our schools today. Just like when I went to high school, the athletic kids were in the gym, the drama kids were in the back of the school, the special-education kids were hidden down a hallway, the students who needed English language support were pulled out on Tuesday afternoons. The leadership kids had a room, the kids who smoked had a pit, and the front of our school was surrounded by kids who dressed like hikers, but didn't hike.

This is integration – groups of students housed together. There is no choice: go here, go there, don't go here, don't go there. At one point in the history of education, I can appreciate that this was a first big step toward inclusive education, but evolution has taught us this isn't enough. There has to be something else that happens in these buildings, or schools are just containers of integration (Thomas and Loxley 2007).

Continuing with this idea of containers, we can also compare segregation and exclusion, whereby segregation involves the separation of groups, and exclusion involves the separation of individuals. Students of diverse cultures, genders, languages, religions, and so on may

experience segregation, whereas individuals with disabilities, people who are transgendered or identify as LGBTQ2S, or even kids like me who were a little plumper than their peers, are some examples of those who often experience exclusion.

If we understand segregation, integration, and exclusion as this idea of forced containers, there becomes a clear distinction between inclusion and the rest. Inclusion, unlike the other three, is the only one of the four that is a voluntary community. We can force people together and apart all we want, but we cannot force people to engage in a community.

I realized this subtle difference when I first jumped on the inclusion bandwagon as a teacher and tore through my secondary school, demanding inclusion in every classroom and student experience in the school. Although the students with developmental disabilities at the high school I worked at were included socially in many areas, it was still unclear what their role in their classes looked like, especially since their opportunities for inclusion were often limited to elective classes. So I was set on making sure they were included everywhere!

On a chilly Thursday afternoon in September, however, the school organized a pep rally for all the grades. I had never been to a pep rally, so the boat horn, banging pots and pans, gym filled with hundreds of screaming teenagers' sensory nightmare was new to me. But it wasn't about *me!* I was being inclusive! So, my 16 students with developmental disabilities and I walked down to the gym – to be inclusive! As we got closer, however, my trail of students lagged farther behind me, with looks of anxiety creeping onto their faces. I simply responded to this worry with, "Come on! There are headphones if it's too loud! We are being inclusive!"

I will never forget one little guy's face when he came up to me and finally said, "Ummm, Ms. Moore. You know that half of us have autism, right?"

What I failed to realize in my fit of inclusion, was that *forcing* them to go to the pep rally was as segregative as if I had *prevented* them from going in the first place. What *would* have been inclusive is if I had said, "Okay, everyone, the pep rally is today! There are headphones for your ears and chairs close to the door for quick escape, or you can just go and scream your face off! It is up to you!" The inclusivity came when I presented the *opportunity* for them to attend a school experience with *support*.

Including students in the pep rally had to be more meaningful that just forcing them to go. I had to also consider the purpose, and give them the choice of participating; otherwise, I was defeating the purpose of the goal I had set out to meet.

On the other side of that coin, however, is that sometimes we are quick to discount a setting, class, or experience for students based on similar assumptions, such as, "Oh, they won't like it," or, "What are those students going to get out of it?" Instead, we end up excluding kids rather than giving them these opportunities with support.

Take me, for example. I can present and speak to hundreds of people – no problem! Presenting is *so* easy for me – it is one of my strengths. No one ever believes me when I tell them that I am an absolute introvert who has social anxiety! Presenting is easy for me because no one talks back. Put me in a house party, though, and I have strict strategies (see box below) to follow – that is, if I make it out of my pyjamas and Netflix-filled house!

House Party Strategies for an Introvert

1. Arrive late.

2. Find a pet or child to play with.

3. If there are no children or pets, find a wall.

4. If someone approaches you, resort to social-skill checklist questions:

   a. How is your mother?

   b. What is your favourite food to cook?

   c. Where is your next vacation?

4. Repeat social skills checklist three times.

5. Leave without saying goodbye.

6. Return to house filled with pyjamas and Netflix.

Here is the thing. I hate parties. My close friends know my people capacity is eight, and any more than that makes me sweat. I was fine living in my awkward, introverted way, but then I started to notice something. During every holiday season, we all receive invites for various festivities and ugly-sweater Christmas parties. I was perusing my Facebook invites one day and realized it was mid-December, and *I didn't have any invites!!!* Because of my social distress, people assumed I didn't want to come to these parties. Now, listen, folks. For all of you with introverted friends, just because we hate it, and just because we don't want to go to your social events, does not mean we don't want to be invited!

We do this to kids *all* the time. The most frequent questions I get from teachers when I register students into curricular classes is, "What are *those* students doing there, and what are *they* going to get out of a high-school science class learning about the periodic table of elements?" They assume that just because a student has a developmental disability, being there would be purposeless. Well, my response to that question is simple: What does *anyone* get out of learning the periodic table of elements?

Often, as students with disabilities get older, the fewer opportunities they have to be part of school experiences and learn with their peers (Downing 2008; Willis 2007; Schnellert, Kozak, and Moore 2015). More and more, schools have adopted a self-contained special-education model for students, especially in high school (Downing 2008; Willis 2007). There, students' educational experience is often limited to life skills and functional academics in a segregated classroom (Milsom 2006; Katims 1997; Pugach and Warger 2001). Although I will never advocate for some of these learning activities to be dismantled, I do advocate for

balance, because I (and many individuals and parents) don't believe that a program focusing only on functional skills, such as money, time, cooking, and other life skills, is an assumption for any of a student's entirety – including education (Pugach and Warger 2001).

I think sometimes we forget that part of our job in educating our future citizens is exposure. Education has a huge role in exposing students to content and experiences that are not just valued by society but are also interesting. Who knows what students will latch onto in their education journey? I had a student with Down syndrome who was included in a social studies 8 class. During a unit about the Vikings, he developed a huge interest in Viking outfits (the helmet in particular), and for the next five years dressed up as a Viking for Halloween! I will also never forget a presentation I went to where Temple Grandin spoke. For those of you who don't know, Temple is a woman with autism who has revolutionized the cattle industry, designing ethical and humane processing plants for slaughtering cows. When someone asked her, "Temple, why cows? What made you interested in cows?" Her response was perfect, "Well, did anyone maybe think that it's because I was exposed to it?!" (Grandin and Panek 2013)

I have had too many students walk through my door as teenagers whose interests do not match their age. Their motivating activities included watching *Blues Clues, Dora the Explorer,* and *The Wiggles,* and playing on Fisher Price pianos, *s*imply because they hadn't been exposed to anything else. Part of public education is to expose kids to interesting and age-appropriate things. This should not be an exception for any learner (Courtade, Spooner, and Browder 2007).

So what is the goal? What is our vision for education? We cannot just accept individuals segregating to what is safe and/or simply bring together or separate students involuntarily to share space as our goal. It is important to recognize this extension beyond the physical location. If integration is the space, inclusion is the bringing together of students in that space to learn from, and build upon, their strengths and the strengths of others (Kliewer, Biklen, and Petersen 2015).

Building and facilitating community between and within diverse groups is an appreciated method worldwide in education, our workplaces, and our communities (Brownlie and King 2011; Schaps 2003; Gibbs 2006; Senge 1990; Block 1994). Knowing how to work effectively within diverse groupings is a skill that needs to be facilitated, taught, and invested in – just like anything else (Benard 1991; Gibbs 2006). First, though, students – *all* students – need the opportunity to be part of the group.

Inclusion is not about integrating students by housing them into (or out of) forced containers of classrooms and schools. Inclusive education *is* about providing opportunities *with* supports for *all* students to have access to, and contribute to, an education rich in content and experience with their peers. Period.