

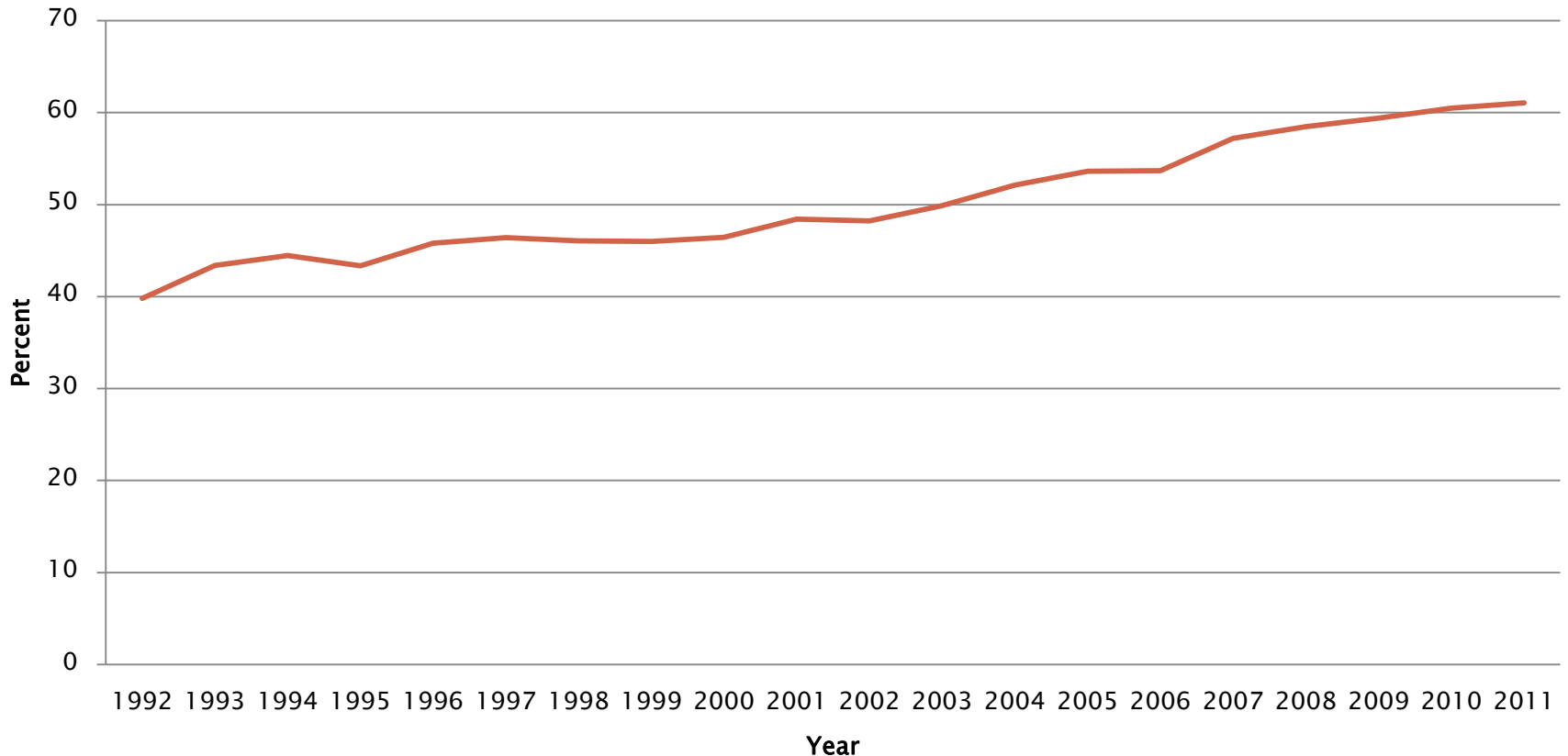
Social Justice and Technocracy: Narrating the Growth of Inclusive Education in the United States

Scot Danforth
Professor and Director
School of Teacher Education
San Diego State University, USA




Inclusion Rising in USA

Percent of Students with Disabilities Highly Included



Highly Included = 80%+ school time
in general education

Questions

- ▶ What are the policy narratives influencing growth of inclusive education in the United States?
 - ▶ How do these policy narratives play out through district-level and school-level decisions concerning education of students with disabilities?
- 

Social Justice Narrative of Inclusion

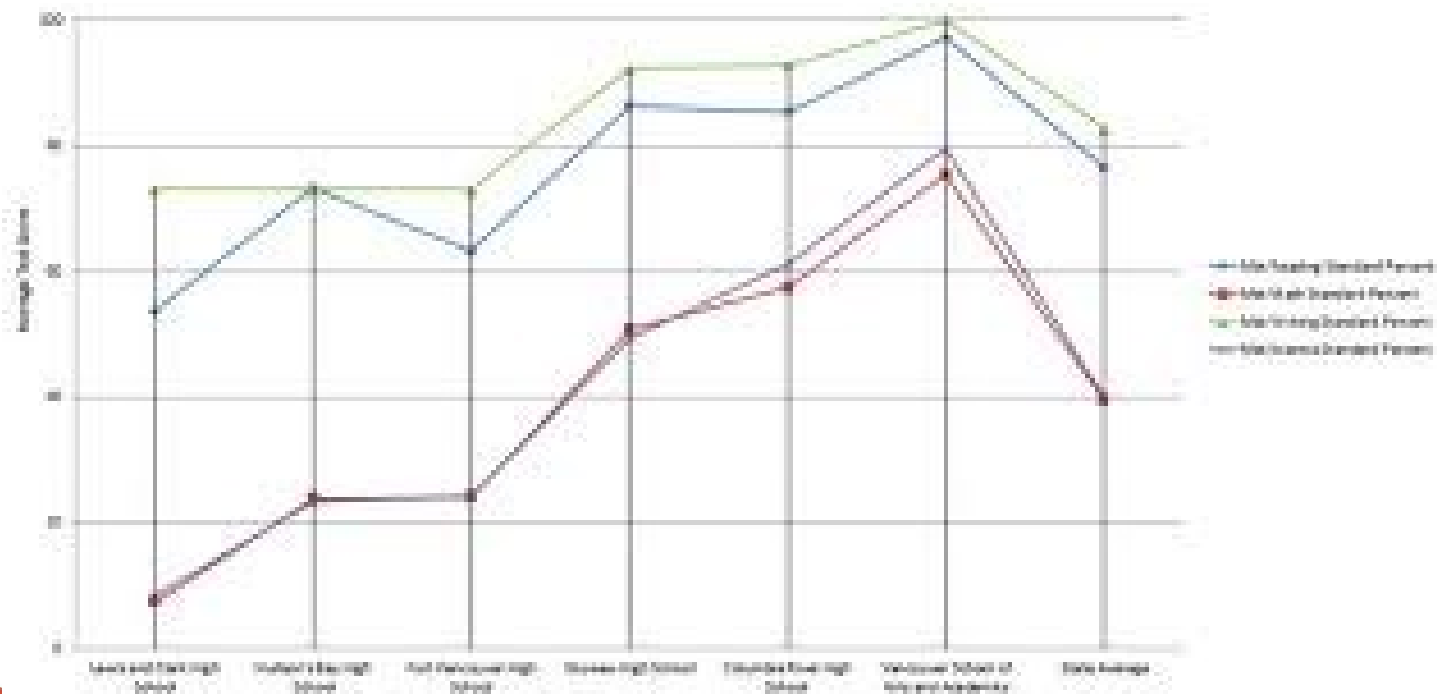
- ▶ “(I)nclusion is not about disability, nor is it only about schools. Inclusion is about social justice. What kind of world do we want to create and how should we educate children for that world? What kinds of skills and commitments do people need to thrive in a diverse society?” (Sapon–Shevin (2003, p. 26)
- ▶ A rhetoric of *moral persuasion based on democratic principles*

Technocratic Narrative of American Educational Policy

- ▶ Top-down managerial control based on quantitative data (test scores)
- ▶ Moral questions (*what is best for children and adolescents?*) replaced by technical questions (*how to measure achievement? how to increase test scores?*)

Technocratic Narrative of American Educational Policy


DATA-DATA-DATA-DATA: Trend lines (test scores) purely represent social reality of schooling




Federal *Technocratic* Policies

- ▶ Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 1997 revision
- ▶ Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 2004 revision
- ▶ No Child Left Behind, 2001

How do these work? Money. Federal government gives states funds if they comply. (And they do!)



Technocratic Policy Components

- ▶ Standards-based accountability reform
 - ▶ Dramatically increased top-down control of teaching
 - Federal government
 - State governments
 - Local school districts
 - Individual schools (Principals)
 - Teachers
- 

Technocratic Policy Components

Each State must

- test all students (including students with disabilities)
 - Mathematics, reading grades 3 – 8 and once during the high school years
 - report assessment results by school, district, and sub-groups (race/ethnicity, low income status, disability, and English learners)

Technocratic Policy Components

- Each State must
 - raise all students to “proficiency” in Math and Reading by 2014
 - make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) each year until 2014
 - make Adequate Yearly Progress *for every sub-group, including students with disabilities*

Technocratic Policy Components:

Response to Intervention



- 3 Levels of Instruction and Support BEFORE Special Education Label
- May allocate up to 15% special education funds to RTI
- NOT mandatory, but widely encouraged and practiced in USA

Key Informant Interviews

- ▶ School District A – Urban, large, diverse (elementary and secondary)
 - Elementary school assistant principal*
 - Elementary school principal*
 - Elementary school principal
 - High School special education coordinator

(*full or near–full inclusion school)


Key Informant Interviews

- ▶ School District B – Urban, small, diverse (elementary only)
 - Elementary school principal
 - District Special Education director
- ▶ School District C – Urban, small, diverse (secondary only)
 - High school principal

Methodology

- ▶ 30–40 minute, semi-structured interviews
- ▶ Data analysis:
 - Thematic, seeking common themes of meaning across interview participants
 - Narrative, seeking examples of policy narratives across participants

Findings

- ▶ Both narratives – social justice and technocracy – involved in growth of inclusion
 - ▶ Inclusion as regulatory compliance – Technocracy pressuring “less inclusive” schools to become more inclusive
 - ▶ Inclusion as social justice furthered by technocratic pressure – “very inclusive” schools becoming more inclusive
- 

Social Justice and Technocracy

- ▶ “A number of different factors have influenced inclusion over the years. Certainly, NCLB – the emphasis on testing, accountability, and highly qualified teachers, made a big difference....We started to say to ourselves, ‘Are we putting these kids where they need to be?’ (Urban HS principal)
- ▶ “There has also been a philosophical change that has occurred over time. We now realize that special education should not be something separate.” (Urban HS principal)

Social Justice and Technocracy

- ▶ “Now every district and every school has to show progress not just for the whole school but for all the sub-groups, including kids with disabilities.....We need for the kids with disabilities to have access to the general education content.” (Urban HS principal)
- ▶ “I think that many kids with mild disabilities, processing issues, average IQ’s, maybe issues like attention, the 2004 IDEA changes tell us to develop strategies to serve them in the general classroom. We shouldn’t be pulling them out.” (Special Education director, small urban district)

Inclusion as regulatory compliance: District A

2008 Dr. Z consultant report:


► Recommended

- Need to implement RTI model
- Too many students with disabilities in separate, special education classes. Need more inclusive classrooms.
- Shift special education responsibility from central office to building principals

Inclusion as regulatory compliance: District A

- ▶ “The district has ramped up efforts based on report written by Dr. Z. This gave us good feedback on our programs. The special education department really took it to heart. And we’ve seen great gains for special education students in inclusion programs.” (Elementary principal)
- ▶ ““The report turned into a mandate from the District to the schools.... Our emphasis now is providing services there (general education classroom).” (Urban HS special education coordinator)
- ▶ “The Dr. Z report was the impetus that changed things at the district level. They brought in a well-known guy, paid him a lot, and they are doing his philosophy. But he had his mind made up before he even arrived. Such baloney. Are you kidding me?” (Urban elementary principal who opposes inclusion)

Inclusion as regulatory compliance: District B

- ▶ “Program Improvement” category, bureaucratic jeopardy, due to low test scores for too many years in a row.
 - ▶ Close monitoring by the State Dept of Education.
 - ▶ District contracted with outside consultants to guide them out of “program improvement”
- 

Inclusion as regulatory compliance: District B

- ▶ “The State gave us a target for inclusion. For kids spending over 80% of time integrated into general classes, we are supposed to have over 76%. Right now, we are only at 48%.” (elementary principal)
- ▶ “We have a huge district push to implement the RTI model. The kids on the IEP’s now receive similar services in the general classroom as the kids not on IEP’s. The interventions are structured to occur in the general class by either gen ed teachers or spec ed teachers.” (elementary principal)

Inclusion as social justice furthered by technocratic pressure

- ▶ Two “inclusive” elementary schools in District A viewed pressure as an opportunity to further their inclusive practices
 - Expansion and improvement of RTI programs
 - More professional development on inclusion – used district grants to fund
 - Sense of validation from district of what they were already doing

Inclusion as social justice furthered by technocratic pressure

- ▶ One of these elementary schools used mandatory state testing program to further confirm their own inclusive practices
- ▶ “We really were helped by the California Modified Assessment (CMA). The students scored poorly in the separate classes. The next year, they did very well on the CMA in general classrooms.” (elementary principal)

Conclusions

- ▶ Both narratives play out within context of specific local narrative of district or school
 - ▶ Top down pressure forces schools to do more inclusion – do they do it well?
 - ▶ Top down pressure validates and supports schools already doing inclusion
 - ▶ General classroom placements vs high quality inclusive schooling?
- 