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James M. Kauffman[a], Jean B. Schumaker[b], Jeanmarie Badar[c], and Betty A. Hallenbeck[d]

[a]University of Virginia; [b]University of Kansas; [c]Charlottesville City Schools; [d]York County Community College

ABSTRACT

We suggest that special education could die among common myths about it. That is, special education could cease to exist, at least as we know it, because its true nature and requirements for its functioning are misunderstood. We discuss only 12 common myths about special education, recognizing that there are many more myths and that the ones we write about could be stated differently. We conclude with comments about how the long roots of the idea that special education could become unnecessary might be traced to a publication by Evelyn Deno in 1970 and express our hope that special education will continue as a separate entity.

Where *does* Special Education go to die? By "where" we mean not only a physical location but an intellectual or conceptual place. We propose that it dies where the myths about it hang out. By "myths" we mean mistaken notions about what special education is and is not. Beliefs in and actions based on myths about special education—intellectual fallacies and policies based on false ideas about how it is like and unlike general education—are more likely to be where special education dies than any physical place.

By "die," we mean "cease to exist as a recognizable entity." We realize that special education can always be renamed, but naming something does not call it into existence. Goodlad (1990) argued that education as a field of study and practice in a college or university will thrive only to the extent that it has visibility, borders, identity, status, budget, personnel, and authority. If it does not have these things, it will die, or at least become ineffective. Kauffman and Hallahan (1993) applied the same arguments to special education in higher education and primary and secondary schools. Others have noted that special education today may be clinging precariously to life and vivacity (e.g., Kauffman, 1999–2000; Kauffman, Anastasiou, & Maag, 2017; Zigmond & Kloo, 2017).

History has shown that the most dangerous myths contain a kernel of truth. Myths distort truth in ways that make them salable, believable, and capable of hiding a larger truth. Crafty politicians, quacks, and true believers in an ideology, a practice, or a product sometimes use partial truths—myths—to manipulate and mislead others. Special education is a project and topic about which such myths are common (e.g., see Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2018; Kauffman, Hallahan, Pullen, & Badar, 2018; Kauffman & Pullen, 1996). Furthermore, special education's life is currently threatened at the same time that faith in the very enterprise of public education is also being undermined (e.g., Christakis, 2017). Moreover, myths about education in general may undermine the belief that special education is indispensable (see Berliner & Glass, 2014; Macdonald, Germaine, Anderson, Christodoulou & McGrath, 2017).

Special education is likely to die in the midst of myths for a variety of reasons. Many myths are appealing because they imply that special education either is not needed or could be much simpler and less expensive than it is now. Myths also make disabilities seem less a disadvantage than they are and less expensive in both dollars and effort. The myth that special education is an outdated idea,

one that the reinvention or restructuring of schools will make irrelevant and unnecessary, appeals to those who devalue special education, think it is more hurtful than helpful, wish to be free of its federal regulation, and want to spend less money for it.

Mistaken notions or myths about special education are numerous, and we can't address them all. Some myths about special education are relatively innocuous, but many are lethal, even if well intentioned. That is, some of the myths about special education are based on sincere beliefs about what is possible and helpful; however, some of those beliefs are misguided. By creating and supporting myths based on misguided beliefs, politicians, program administrators, and advocates may be inadvertently contributing to special education's disappearance as a separate, effective entity. A question too seldom considered carefully is this: "What are the implications of this idea for helpful and robust special education services?"

Clearly, explaining what special is and why we need it requires book-length treatment (e.g., Bateman, Tankersley, & Lloyd, 2015; Kauffman et al., 2018). Even then, not *all* myths about special education can be considered. Clearly, we must select for this brief discussion only some of the myths we think contribute most to special education's difficulties, those we think are most threatening to special education's existence. Our best guess is that the following dozen myths are among those occupying the cognitive space where special education is most likely to die.

Myth #1: restructuring is the key to improving schools

A common notion is that some sort of restructuring or reconfiguration of schools will improve student achievement and also achieve social justice for all students. The thinking is that alternatives such as privatization, chartering, school choice, size of school, co-teaching, full inclusion, and other reconfigurations will improve schools. This is not a new idea, but a very old one, and even those who complain that school reformers suggest nothing new (e.g., Hess, 2010) seem to fall into the same-old -same-old pattern of concentrating on structure while giving little or no attention to instruction (Kauffman, 2010b, 2011b).

Making schools private, chartering them but publically funding them, changing the size of schools, focusing on parental choice of schools, changing the grade levels in school buildings, and transforming them to include all learners in the same classes are all willow-o'-the-wisps that school reformers have found appealing for many years (e.g., see Ravitch, 2013). Believing that such changes will improve student performance is nefarious, undermining both faith in public schools and a focus on what actually makes schools more effective—better instruction for each learner (see also Kauffman, 2010a, 2010b).

Co-teaching is one example of the many restructuring efforts that have taken place in schools. It is based on the notion that by pooling their knowledge and talents, general and special education teachers working together in the same classroom are able to instruct *all* students in the class well. However, researchers have tried and failed to show that co-teaching "works" with regard to producing better outcomes (e.g., Boudah, Schumaker, & Deshler, 1997; Boudah & Shankland, in press). Cook, McDuffy-Landrum, Oshita, and Cook (2017) reviewed the research on co-teaching and concluded that the empirical research supporting it is both sparse and inconclusive. Furthermore, as Imray and Colley (2017) argued on the grounds of experience and logic, no such co-teaching can possibly meet the educational needs of some students with severe cognitive disabilities. Moreover, Samuels (2017) reported that much instruction is being given over to paraprofessionals in some places while calling the method "co-teaching."

Some of the other and latest attempts at successful reconfiguration include both inclusion and tiered instruction. Some of the "structures" that are being suggested include response to instruction or intervention and other elaborations popularly known as multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). Positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) are also being used widely. These are good ideas, not bad inventions, but they supply only structures within which instruction can take place. They do not address special education's core difficulties, such as deciding what a student needs,

labeling, sorting, and providing effective and targeted instruction for those who do not respond well to instruction that is effective for most other students (Imray & Colley, 2017; Johns, Kauffman, & Martin, 2016; Kauffman, Anastasiou, Badar, & Hallenbeck, in press; Kauffman, Badar, & Wiley, in press).

Moreover, the more traditional "framework" known as the IDEA (i.e., existing federal special education law and its regulations) has been described as "a solution hiding in plain sight" (Cannon, Gregory, & Waterstone, 2013). The IDEA dates from 1975, but that does not mean its framework and major provisions are outdated, as some might argue (see Martin, 2013; Weintraub, 2012). So far, there seems to be little or no discussion of just how, if at all, IDEA fits into or works along with MTSS and related frameworks for serving students with disabilities (Kauffman, Bsdar & Wiley in press).

Even the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD), in its requirements for education (Article 24), seems to focus on the *structure* of education. The CRPD ignores what actually most improves the school experience of individuals with disabilities—better, more appropriate *instruction*—and expresses primary concern for inclusion (Anastasiou, Gregory, & Kauffman, 2018; Kauffman & Badar, 2014, 2016).

The myth that the structure or configuration of special education holds the key to its improvement distracts people from the real key—better instruction and behavior management of individual students. It results in professional organizations' and individuals' emphasis on changing the place or responsible personnel or other structural features of special education. It proposes a kind of general education that reformers have pursued relentlessly, but without success. Many attempts to find a configuration that works better may meet with some measure of success in some instances. However, eventually the failure of the reconfiguration becomes obvious—the reform collapses—when it is brought to scale or examined carefully. Special education would do better to focus on the more difficult, real-world issues related to its problems—improvement of its core functions, and careful, realistic judgments of its success.

Myth #2: over-identification of judgmental disabilities is the biggest problem of special education

All disabilities are "judgmental," in that someone must make the judgment that a student qualifies for something (e.g., special education). Of course, some judgments are easy, because the student is obviously in one category or another, and some are hard because there is some ambiguity about the qualification. Students are sometimes very close to whatever the cut-point is on a given measurement (see Kauffman & Lloyd, 2017).

The most "judgmental" disabilities are mild disabilities, and the disabilities most often considered "judgmental" are cognitive and/or behavioral—learning disabilities (LD), emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) (or emotional disturbance [ED] as the federal category is known), and intellectual disabilities (ID) on the mild end of the distribution of ID. These disabilities are often considered trivial or even nonexistent, particularly if they are relatively mild and are found more often in a particular ethnic group, social class, sex, or other identifiable group. Controversy rages about the existence and causes of disproportionate representation in various groups (see Kauffman & Anastasiou, in press).

In spite of data to the contrary, belief in over-identification of students in some categories, particularly LD and EBD, persists (e.g., see Forness, Freeman, Paparella, Kauffman, & Walker, 2012; Gordon, 2017; Kauffman & Badar, 2018b; Kauffman & Landrum, 2018; Kauffman, Mock, & Simpson, 2007; Kauffman, Simpson, & Mock, 2009; Spurlock, 2017; Warner, 2010). Sometimes, such belief in the myth of over-identification has been spurred by concern about disproportionality in identification or misrepresentation of facts about identification. Under-identification (false negatives, the non-identification of those who do actually have disabilities) continues to be a major problem in some areas of special education.

The myth of over-identification fosters attempts to reduce special education, portraying it as an unnecessary and costly appendage to general education, at best, or a perverse and discriminatory system, at worst. This myth encourages the belief that special education is often misguided, if not malicious, and it precludes prevention because it highlights the horror of the false positive (wrongful identification) as worse than the mistake known as the false negative (failure to identify) (Kauffman, 2009, 2014b; Kauffman & Badar, 2018). Special education must see false negatives—*failure to identify*—as its primary concern.

Myth #3: disabilities should be treated like other forms of diversity

This myth refers to the notion that disabilities are a kind of difference that, like skin color, should not result in a placement other than a typical neighborhood school's general education settings. Equating disability with color is a red herring dating at least back to the regular education initiative of the 1980s. For example, Stainback and Stainback (1991) used the Supreme Court's finding in the 1954 school desegregation case *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* to argue that "separate is inherently unequal." They falsely asserted that disabilities are like students' ethnic origins in determining educational placement and treatment.

The difference between disabilities and ethnicity is often misunderstood and used to condemn special education as a form of segregation (Johnson, 1969; Kauffman, Nelson, Simpson, & Ward, 2017). The myth is used to decry the disproportionate placement of ethnic minorities in special education, as well as to support the idea that full inclusion is morally justified because it ends "segregation" (Kauffman, Anastasiou, Badar, Travers, & Wiley, 2016; Kauffman, Anastasiou et al. in press).

The ways in which disabilities and ethnic origins are different are numerous and important for education (Kauffman & Landrum, 2009). Many dimensions of diversity have very few if any implications for instruction. For example, the fundamentals of reading instruction do not differ, depending on a student's color (of skin or hair or eyes), parentage or ancestry, nation of origin, or physical size or shape. However, reading instruction does need to differ, depending on what a student knows and needs to learn—the essential nature of disabilities in the context of education (Hallahan et al., 2018; Kauffman et al., 2018). In short, disability has relevance to instruction that ethnicity and many other forms of diversity do not.

The myth that disability is merely another form of diversity without unique implications for teaching is a form of anti-intellectualism that has become popular and could lead to the conclusion that disability, at least in some of its forms, is chic—something fashionable, if not desirable (Kauffman & Badar, 2018a). After all, one could argue that in the current era, "nothing is too dark or disturbing to be refashioned as kitsch" (Schulman, 2017)—nor, we might conclude, too dark or disturbing to be considered chic.

Suggesting that disability is just another form of diversity leads to the argument that special education is a ruse for providing second-rate education, a way of segregating children by using the false claim that they need different education because of their disabilities. Part of the reasoning is that African American children are, based on their percentage of the general child population and their percentage of special education enrollments, disproportionately likely to be identified as having a disability, particularly in some categories. Like the first two myths discussed, this myth can be used to turn perceptions of special education toward the negative, making special education seem malicious—an excuse to use an instructionally or behaviorally trivial difference to separate and segregate students in educational environments (see Johnson, 1969). Saying that disabilities are just another form of diversity, no more important for instruction than color or parentage, suggests acceptance of the differences we call disabilities. In fact, it may attach special value to them and suggest not trying to change them. This way of thinking is the antithesis of special education (Kauffman, 1999). Special education should focus on how disabilities are unique diversities upon which instruction should be based.

Myth #4: education is not and cannot be made scientific

Denial that instruction can be based on scientific evidence and that such a science exists and should be the bedrock of special education has been furthered by the philosophy of postmodernism (Kauffman, 2011a; Kauffman & Sasso, 2006). Nevertheless, scientific evidence regarding teaching is considerable (e.g., see Bateman, 2004; Engelmann, 1969, 1997; Engelmann, Bateman, & Lloyd, 2007; Engelmann & Carnine, 2011; Snider, 2006). Denying scientific evidence in favor of "alternative ways of knowing" about education has been called "willful ignorance" (see Sasso, 2001, 2007). Science has been and should be important in the development of special education's theory and practice (see Kauffman, 2011a, 2014a, 2014b; Kauffman, Anastasiou, & Maag 2017; Landrum, 2015). Science is neither the only tool we have nor a perfect tool for "interrogating" and improving practices in special education, but it is surely the best one available to us (Kauffman & Sasso, 2006; Landrum, 2015). The scientific approach is indispensable in discriminating the value of specific practices and programs, often revealing the differences between those that are based on reliable evidence, regardless of their age, and those that are fads, whether "new" or old (see Landrum, 2015).

One difficulty in maintaining fidelity to the idea of scientific evidence is the use of social media, including the Internet, to dispense claims of scientific evidence. Science is difficult, and researching educational issues using the scientific method is particularly difficult (Berliner, 2002; Kauffman, 2014c). Many approaches to education, including special education, make a facile claim of scientific legitimacy without revealing the details of the "science" on which they are supposedly based. Many claims made by Internet sites and other social media are false, and there is no substitute for careful examination of the nature of the "evidence" that something "works" or is supported by science.

A prominent misconception about special education is that it should not be judged by outcomes. The development and perpetuation of this myth can be blamed, at least in part, on justifiable rejection of the idea that test scores have become "the coin of the realm" in judging educational progress and making comparisons of schools and individuals. Certainly, test scores can become too important, and they can be misinterpreted and abused. Silly or misleading comparisons of outcomes can be made (see Kauffman, 2008). Nevertheless, special education is only as good as the performance outcomes of children receiving it. The outcomes must involve progress in skills and behavior that are meaningful for the individual child, and these may involve academic progress measured by standardized testing or progress in social or self-care skills. In other words, the science of producing and measuring meaningful outcomes for students with disabilities is quite sophisticated and may be quite different from the science of assessing outcomes of general education (Kauffman, 2011a).

Another aspect of this myth relates to extreme statements that people make about scientific data —either, on the one hand, that someone can "make the data say whatever they want" or, on the other hand, that "the data speak for themselves." Scientific data, especially those near the limits of what is known, can be matters of intense debate as to their meaning, but it is not true that they can be interpreted willy-nilly (to mean whatever one wants). However, we must also be aware that data themselves are meaningless and demand interpretation. Data are mute; scientists are not.

Without belaboring the nature of science and its alternatives, we are concerned that the myth that education is not and cannot be made scientific—specifically, the assertion that special education has no real scientific roots—is a misunderstanding fostering the corruption of ideas fundamental to the improvement of education for students with disabilities. Responding most productively and humanely to educational disabilities requires a clear commitment to the methods of science (Kauffman et al., 2017).

Myth #5: special education is just good teaching

Some individuals have argued that good teaching is the same for all students, a myth that is appealing to those who want to accommodate all students with disabilities in general education settings. This myth is used to support the claim that special education is a waste of money because

good teaching is simply good teaching—there is nothing really special about special education. In direct contradiction to this myth, the federal government has invested hundreds of millions of dollars since the 1970s in the development of instructional methods and programs that produce impressive results with students with disabilities. One example of the fruits of this investment is the 40-year-old line of research conducted by associates of the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning (KU-CRL) (Schumaker & Deshler, 2010). Beginning in 1978, KU-CRL researchers determined that students with learning disabilities were entering the junior-high grades reading, on average, at the fourth-grade level (Warner, Schumaker, Alley, & Deshler, 1980). Thus, they could not read their textbooks and other materials that were written at their grade level (seventh grade). Moreover, they could not write complete sentences. They were failing their subject-area courses due to their deficits in studying for and taking tests. Additionally, they had developed no strategies for coping with their deficits (Warner et al., 1980), and they were not able to create their own strategies (Ellis, Deshler, & Schumaker, 1989). They were *not* responding well to adequate instruction for students without disabilities.

As a result, the KU-CRL researchers reasoned that these students needed a type of intensive and explicit instruction that would enable them to meet the demands of their junior-high and senior-high coursework (Schumaker & Deshler, 1984). Moreover, the instruction had to work in a "triage" fashion to enable the students to perform at acceptable levels in their courses quickly. The researchers reasoned that if the students did not start passing courses soon, they would be dropping out of school by ninth grade. They created a line of intervention research, producing instructional programs for effectively teaching students with LD and other disabilities the learning strategies they need for writing relatively error-free sentences, paragraphs, and themes, gaining meaning from textbooks, taking notes, studying for and taking tests, and completing assignments. These programs are now collectively known as the *Learning Strategies Curriculum* (Deshler & Schumaker, 1986; Schumaker & Deshler, 1992).

The instructional methods used in this curriculum have been validated in many research studies. These methods include describing the strategy to students, modeling the strategy, ensuring that the student can name the strategy steps to mastery, conducting practice of the strategy on easy tasks and then on tasks that are similar to tasks in the general education environment, providing feedback on students' practice attempts, ensuring mastery of the strategy, and ensuring that students generalize the strategy to their general education coursework (Ellis, Deshler, Lenz, Schumaker, & Clark, 1991). These methods can be used in a triage fashion to quickly reduce deficits. For example, students can gain three or four grade levels in reading (decoding or comprehension) in as few as four to eight weeks (e.g., Fritschmann, Deshler, & Schumaker, 2007; Lenz & Hughes, 1990; Schumaker et al., 2006). The methods have been very effective in ensuring that students with learning disabilities can meet the complex demands of their general education courses. In fact, failing students can earn passing grades once they have learned a strategy (Hughes & Schumaker, 1991a, 1991b). Moreover, students with EBD, as well as LD, can achieve the same success when they also receive the instruction (Hughes, Deshler, Ruhl, & Schumaker, 1993).

These instructional programs and those developed by other research teams in the field of special education are now available for use in school districts across the nation. Those evidence-based interventions that are most effective are listed on the What Works Clearinghouse website (https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc), the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) website (http://www.evidenceforessa.org/programs), the National Center on Intensive Intervention website (http://www.intensiveintervention.org/chart/instructional-intervention-tools), and others. School districts across the nation are using these interventions. For example, more than 100,000 teachers in 50 states and foreign nations have learned how to teach the Sentence Writing Strategy (Schumaker, personal communication, 2017). This is just one program in the *Learning Strategies Curriculum* composed of 43 programs.

Unfortunately, school personnel often choose to implement interventions that have no empirical basis. They implement "homework support," "learning/teaching styles," or "tutoring centers" in hopes that if such ineffective procedures are use, then students' skills will improve. These types of

support have not been shown to be effective in either keeping students in school or teaching them new skills. Although one of these ineffective programs might enable students to complete homework, for example, they do not enable students to do well on key course requirements (e.g., tests, essays) that enable them to earn a passing grade or learn what the teacher is trying to teach. Clearly, school administrators who do not ensure that their special education teachers learn about and use empirically validated instructional programs are neglecting whole subgroups of their student populations. They are ignoring the results that can be achieved with students who have disabilities by highly trained teachers who are able to provide direct, intensive, and explicit instruction using empirically validated programs. They are morally culpable for not offering programs that can help students learn, succeed, stay in school, and potentially move on to post-secondary educational programs.

The myth that special education is not actually "special" undermines the development of effective teaching procedures for students with disabilities. The shard of truth in the myth is that it is *sometimes* possible for a general education teacher to use methods developed by special educators to address the learning problems of students. The larger truth is the disgraceful conclusion "that special education is so *not-special* that it can be delivered by a generalist, busy teaching 25 other students" (Zigmond & Kloo, 2017, p. 259) in *most* cases. Special education and a continuum of alternative placements is needed, and needed badly, if we are to address the learning difficulties of *all* students with disabilities (Imray & Colley, 2017; Kauffman, 2015; Kauffman et al., 2018). Special education must renew its commitment to *special instruction* if it is to survive and flourish.

Myth #6: special education does not work if it is separate

The myth that *separate* special education does not work was created by the proponents of full inclusion (e.g., Lipsky & Gartner, 1996; Sailor, 2009; Sailor & McCart, 2014; Stainback & Stainback, 1991; see also SWIFT schools, 2017). Some proponents reason that the "segregation" of students into a separate program makes them feel "left out" and destroys their self-confidence. Others reason that these students with disabilities need to learn social skills, and the best place to learn them is in the general education classroom in the same milieu as normally achieving peers. Although these arguments might be valid to a point, they do not take into account the importance of giving students with disabilities the type of instruction they need through the use of the specific instructional methods that work for them.

For example, if students with disabilities need to learn how to decode long multi-syllable words in order to read the materials in their courses, they should be getting that kind of instruction. Unfortunately, that instruction is not likely to be available in their science course, where the general education teacher is responsible for teaching the science standards to 150 students per day. The majority of those students in general education already have learned those skills; students with disabilities did not. Additionally, the kinds of the intensive and explicit instruction that have been validated for teaching these kinds of skills to students with disabilities are simply not practical when teaching large heterogeneous classes of students. The instructional methods described under Myth #4 (e.g., modeling, practice to mastery, individual feedback; see Ellis et al.,1991) are methods that require exceptional teacher time and effort to deliver them effectively. For instance, when modeling a skill or strategy for students, a teacher must think aloud so that students can witness all the thinking processes involved in performing the skill or strategy. The teacher also must explicitly tell the students to imitate the teacher's thinking and behaviors and then involve the students in modeling for each other, taking care that their models are appropriate. During practice activities, the teacher must provide feedback to each student after each practice attempt and ensure that the student keeps practicing for as many attempts as needed to reach mastery. Such instructional methods are not feasible in general education classes, where the majority of students need to practice a given skill once or twice before moving on to learning about a different skill.

Thus, one might argue that special education programs are best delivered in settings where certain conditions are present. Those conditions require that students can focus on the skills or strategies they need to be successful, that they receive individual attention from a highly-trained teacher, that they re-practice as needed, that they receive individual feedback tailored to their strengths and mistakes, and that the difficulty of the task be adjusted to become more difficult as the student progresses. If these conditions cannot be met, the effectiveness of the instructional programs will certainly be lost for these students. Therefore, the emphasis must be not on separate or inclusive settings but on the settings that provide the best conditions for student progress (Anastasiou et al., 2018; Imray & Colley, 2017).

Nevertheless, because *some* of a student's time is spent in a separate instructional setting from other students does not mean that *all* of that student's time has to be spent in that separate setting. Nor does it mean that no student should receive all instruction in a separate setting. In fact, some students can benefit greatly from being included in general education settings part of the time for several reasons. First, students need to be aware of the demands of the general education setting and aware of the fact when they cannot meet those demands. This enables them to become motivated to learn ways of meeting those demands. In addition, they need settings in which they can apply their newly learned skills and strategies. Without the opportunity to generalize what they have learned and see the success they can achieve, students can become disenchanted with academic pursuits. Thus, the issue must be reframed. The larger issue is not whether *all* students should *ever* or *only* be in separate educational settings versus inclusive educational settings. In fact, there is no issue at all. Students with disabilities should be in both types of settings according to their instructional needs.

Truthfully, the idea of *full inclusion* is dead (Imray & Colley, 2017). In fact, it was DOA (dead on arrival) because it is disconnected with the nature of the full spectrum of disabilities. A viable, vibrant special education depends on determination to maintain the full continuum of alternative placements that federal special education regulation has required since 1975 and on making every type of placement on that continuum serve the best educational interests of students with every kind of disability (U. S. Department of Education, 2018).

Myth #7: special education does not work because the mean achievement of students with disabilities who receive services does not equal the mean achievement of other students

One egregious mistake of logic is the myth that any type of services provided by "special education" will close the achievement gap between students receiving special education and those in general education, and if it does not, then it does not work. This myth does not take into account the fact that different districts can choose to implement different types of services for students with disabilities. It also does not take into account the notion that different types of disabilities may create a ceiling for a student's achievement. Furthermore, it does not take into account that students with different types of disabilities need different types of services.

To provide some background on this issue, in the late 1970s, data were gathered to compare the achievement profile of students with learning disabilities to the achievement profile of other students (low-achieving and normally achieving students) using a cross-sectional snapshot. Students with LD were chosen as the target population because they represented the largest number of students with disabilities (they still do). The type of special education service the students in the study were receiving was homework-assistance tutoring.

The results showed that as the students with learning disabilities were entering seventh grade in participating schools, they were reading on average at the fourth-grade level. In each subsequent grade, their reading achievement plateaued. That is, they continued to read at the fourth-grade level through the twelfth grade. Meanwhile, the average reading level of other low-achieving students was at the fifth-grade level as they entered seventh grade. Again, their reading achievement plateaued across the remaining grades. In contrast, the reading achievement level for the normally achieving

students (those who were passing their secondary courses) was at grade level when they entered seventh grade and increased each grade thereafter (Graner & Deshler, 2012; Warner, Schumaker, Alley, & Deshler, 1980). In other words, when students with learning disabilities were receiving assignment-completion tutoring as their service, the gap between their achievement and the normally achieving students' achievement was widening as they progressed through the grades. In seventh grade, students with LD were reading on average at the fourth-grade level, representing a three-grade gap. In twelfth grade, students with LD were still reading at the fourth-grade level, representing an eight-grade gap. Meanwhile, they were expected to be reading textbooks written at the tenth to seventeenth grade levels (Putnam, Deshler, & Schumaker, 1992). With the gap increasingly widening, students cannot be expected to meet the demands of their high school courses or stay interested and motivated to even try to complete the work.

Nevertheless, as described under Myth #5, certain special education services can be used to narrow, and even close, the achievement gap for individuals with LD. Some students can be taught to decode and comprehend at grade level (e.g., Fritschmann et al., 2007; Lenz, & Hughes, 1990). They can be taught to write sentences, paragraphs, and themes (see Schumaker & Deshler, 2003; 2009 for a review). They can be taught to study for and take tests at a level of performance equal to their peers (Hughes & Schumaker, 1991a). They can earn passing grades in their courses by generalizing the strategies they have learned (Hughes & Schumaker, 1991a; Schmidt, Deshler, Schumaker, & Alley, 1988/89). Furthermore, similar results can be achieved with some students who have EBD (Hughes et al., 1993). These results were achieved in studies conducted in schools under typical school conditions.

To conclude, then, closing the achievement gap for *some* students with disabilities is a possibility. However, this possibility depends on two factors. First, the students will be students with IQs in the normal range. Second, they will be those who participate in the kinds of special education programs that have been empirically shown to be effective in closing the gap. The bottom line is that all programs that are labeled "special education" are not alike, and they cannot be expected to produce the same results. Special education should be expected to help students with disabilities do better with it than they would without it, but that does not mean *all* students with disabilities can or should be expected to a perform within the average range for the general population of students (Kauffman, 2008).

Myth #8: special education creates low expectations

Exactly what to expect a student to do is one of the fundamental tasks of a teacher. How to get expectations just right is a fundamental question addressed in good teacher preparation. Certainly, expectations cannot reasonably be the same for all students. Some expectations will be higher than others, and a trap—essentially a myth—is that a lower expectation necessarily creates lower achievement. Federal special education law requires that students with disabilities be given access to the general education curriculum to the maximum extent possible if they are to meet developmental goals and be prepared to live as productively and independently as possible (see Bateman, 2007, 2017; Yell, Crockett, Shriner, & Rozalski, 2017). For many students with disabilities, programming that provides direct, intensive, and explicit instruction provided by highly trained special education teachers using empirically validated programs can result in achievement outcomes that are similar to those of students in general education.

However, disabilities come in many forms and exist on a continuum, from mild to moderate to severe, with enormous differences among individuals. For many students with moderate to severe cognitive impairments, much of the general education curriculum is not particularly relevant to their post-school lives. At the same time, they may be lacking fundamental "functional" skills that are directly linked to increased independence and productivity later in life.

Individual Education Programs (IEPs) begin with a statement about a student's "present level of performance" (PLOP), which describes both academic and functional skills (Bateman, 2017;

Bateman & Linden, 2012). In order for an IEP to be a meaningful document, goals and objectives should be directly linked to the student's PLOP and consist of knowledge, skills, and behaviors that are most likely to improve post-school outcomes. These may include skills such as the following: time and money skills; self-care and personal hygiene skills; domestic skills like cooking, cleaning, and doing laundry; mobility skills like using public transportation; and participating in appropriate recreational and leisure activities. For a student with a significant cognitive disability, a "high" standard is not necessarily a grade-level general education standard; it may very well be a standard based on important skills without which the student will be less independent and less functional later in life (Ayres, Lowrey, Douglas, & Sievers, 2011; Imray & Colley, 2017).

Insistence that expectations and curriculum be the same for all students, regardless of ability is among the most destructive myths threatening the viability of special education. "High expectations" for one student may be low for another, and recognizing the limitations and needs of individuals is necessary for humane and productive treatment of both students and their teachers. Ayres et al. (2011) addressed this myth well:

> All educators should have high expectations for their students and seek to challenge their students at appropriate levels, but learning fragments of higher level academic skills should not be achieved at the cost of learning how to function independently in society. (p. 11)

Myth #9: special education's problems are compounded by "deficit thinking" and "ableism"

"Deficit thinking" and "ableism" have been blamed for many of special education's woes (e.g., Harry & Klingner, 2007, 2014; Hehir, 2007). "Deficit thinking" is a catch-all term, but in the context of special education represents conjecture that students' labels or identification as needing special education contributes to their learning problems. The blame for low achievement is based on the idea of oppression, as if the mere act of thinking about deficits creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. "Ableism" refers to discrimination or prejudice against individuals with disabilities but also to the idea that focusing on ability is inherently better than focusing on disability.

Students with disabilities do have deficits related to learning, and that is why they are identified for special education. Furthermore, special educators are in the business of recognizing, addressing, and changing disabilities. They value ability above disability, and they seek to make individuals as able as possible. In one way, they may be described as "ableists" because they see added value in an individual's greater ability to do something, and they focus on helping students with disabilities become more able. They are *not* ableists in the sense of treating those with disabilities in an unfair way or supposing that those with disabilities are inherently less worthy human beings.

The myths that recognizing a deficit creates it or makes it worse and that focusing on making students with disabilities more able somehow adds to their disabilities need to be abandoned. The most significant deficit is in people's lack of thoughtfulness and humanity in evaluating students' disabilities and the deficits that accompany them. One problem is failure to see how the diversities we call disabilities are uniquely different from ethnic differences for education, as we suggested earlier (see our discussion of Myth #3).

Another deficit in thinking about disabilities is failure to recognize the perversity of giving up primary concern for appropriate education for the sake of achieving ethnic balance and inclusion. Making the achievement of ethnic proportionality or inclusion equal to or more important than appropriate instruction is a betrayal of special education's purpose. Two myths surely sound a death knell for special education: (a) education focused on disability is harmful and (b) inclusion of all students with disabilities in general education is essential.

Perhaps the worst kind of deficit thinking and ableism occur when administrators choose, and recommend or require teachers to use, unsubstantiated (popular, but not based on sound evidence)

methods of instruction for students with disabilities. Such administrative fiats result in the neglect of these children and sells their learning short.

Special educators should have a clear-eyed focus on explicating students' educational deficits and concentrate their efforts on addressing deficits effectively. Additionally, special educators should redouble efforts to make students with disabilities more able. Education, but particularly special education, loses its purpose when deficits are not recognized and addressed in ways that reduce or eliminate them and make children able to do things they previously could not. Special education is the business of recognizing deficits before they become unnecessarily large, treating individuals with deficits or disabilities as valuable human beings, and helping these individuals become as able as possible.

Myth #10: appropriate education depends on preparing general educators to teach *all* students

The education field expects a skilled teacher to know how to group students and differentiate instruction for learners who fall within a reasonable range of abilities and achievement levels. However, all teachers have limits regarding the diversity of learners with whom they can deal effectively. The more students differ, in terms of what they know and what they need to learn, the more difficult the task of the teacher becomes. Expecting all or even most teachers to possess the knowledge and skills to provide appropriate, effective instruction to a group of students that includes both students with disabilities of all kinds and those with no disabilities (never mind those who are exceptionally able) is pie-in-the-sky thinking.

Again, consider the fact that "students with disabilities" represents a vastly heterogeneous group, in terms of disability *type* and *severity*. In most professions, increased specialization results in an advancement or improvement of services. Imagine that if being a "doctor" (physician) meant that the doctor needs to know how to treat patients with *all* types of medical needs and perform *all* medical procedures, everything from diagnosing the flu to performing brain surgery, and that the doctor should do this without needing special places to do any of those tasks! Or, suppose that piloting aircraft did not involve specialization in aircraft or purpose of flying, and that flying is flying so that any pilot should be prepared to fly *all* aircraft for *all* purposes. Got a pilot's license? OK, you're good to fly anything anywhere for any reason!

No one would argue in favor of such outrageous ideas; in fact, most people would agree that the lack of specialization would be a step *backward* in nearly any field. In medicine, for example, lack of specialization would certainly result in poorer outcomes for patients. Why, then, would someone in the field of education argue that all teachers should become "generalists" and that the need for specialists and special places for instruction is unwarranted—that special knowledge and skills are not needed for teaching students at the extreme ends of the "normal" statistical distribution, and a special place to do this is never required? In short, why would anyone want to make the challenging job of teaching even *more* difficult? Have our general education classrooms and teachers become *so excellent* and student outcomes in general education become *so positive* that we must add a whole new level of complexity and competency into the mix?

In our view, advocating that all teachers should be prepared to teach all students reflects serious underestimation of the complexity of teaching effectively and an almost total lack of understanding of the educational implications of the full range of disabilities. The idea that all teachers should be prepared to teach all students is a myth that leads to the denigration of education generally and special education in particular, and it makes instruction of children with disabilities a farce.

Myth #11: educators, special or general, must adjust their teaching styles to match their students' learning styles

The emphasis on the existence and importance of "learning style" as well as "teaching style" is one of the great myths of education that is popular among both teachers and the general public. As it turns out, "style" is significant for neither teaching nor learning. Lilienfeld, Lynn, Ruscio, and Beyerstein (2010) include it among the top 50 great myths of popular psychology: "So the popular belief that encouraging teachers to match their TS [teaching style] to students' LS [learning style] turns out to be an urban legend of educational psychology" (p. 98). These styles, in both teaching and learning, have often been described as visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or tactile (VAKT, sometimes just VAK). As Hattie and Yates (2014) conclude, "Claims that there can be a mismatch between your teaching style and the style of learning an individual student supposedly exhibits are highly dubious" (p. 183). In fact, the large, robust, and well-established body of research on effective instruction includes no mention at all of such learning styles (Bateman, 2004). Rather, reliable research on teaching identifies the features of instruction that are proven to result in superior learning by virtually all students.

Notwithstanding the debunking of "styles" of teaching and learning, educators have endured a barrage of in-service training on the merits of teaching based on "styles." Extant research on effective instruction, by its very existence, negates the notion of learning styles. If learning styles existed and were a salient feature in student success, then research on Direct Instruction would have supported the importance of "style" in teaching and learning. If, in fact, students had different styles in learning, then the most effective teaching methods would have to be different for each of these subtypes or "styles" of students. Were this the case, any method of instruction might be determined, through well-designed research, to work with students of one learning style but be significantly less effective with students who had different learning styles. The entire body of research on effective teaching disproves the notion that learning styles exist and that they are a vital feature that teachers must consider when implementing instruction in their classrooms.

Myth #12: special education is attributable primarily to the thinking and action of educators

A popular myth among special educators is that educators, not parents, are primarily responsible for the existence of special education law. Actually, the historical record does not support this. Educators like Elizabeth Farrell, teachers who founded the Council for Exceptional Children, and physicians and ministers who did pioneering work with children who have disabilities, were instrumental in making special education what it has become (Gerber, 2017; Hallahan et al., 2018; Kauffman, 1981; Kauffman & Landrum, 2006). Nevertheless, the advocacy of parents for their children was the factor that actually resulted in the passage of mandatory federal legislation for education of all children with disabilities (Martin, 2013).

Parents were invaluable in creating the special education legislation we have. They are invaluable partners in making special education what it should be. Additionally, if special education becomes an afterthought, those who would demean or destroy the federal special education law will have to overcome the demands of parents that it be preserved.

Concluding remarks on special education's death and dying

A concern expressed in some of the past and current literature about special education is that special education is losing both its identity as a profession that is clearly different from general education as well as its focus on special instruction (e.g., Boudah & Shkankland, in press; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010; Kauffman, Anastasiou, & Maag, 2017; Kauffman & Badar, 2014; 2016; Zigmond & Kloo, 2017). Among the myths that could contribute to the death of special education is the one that good

teaching is simply that—good teaching—and, therefore, special education is not really special, that students with disabilities should be treated like all other students, and that special education is so simple and *non*special that even paraeducators and other relatively untrained assistants can do it in the context of general education. Perhaps myths along these lines were best captured in a report by Samuels (2017):

> "Problematically, teacher assistants have become almost exclusively the way, rather than a way, to support students with disabilities in general education classrooms, especially those with severe … disabilities," said Michael Giangreco, the director of Project EVOLVE Plus at the University of Vermont, which works with schools and districts on inclusion issues.

Myths along the lines of others we have discussed also contribute to special education's apparent slide toward demise. Perhaps Deno (1970) did not fully appreciate how the field would evolve or devolve when she wrote:

> Does special education need to exist at all as a separate administrative system? Further, if it needs to exist now because of conditions that prevailed in education in the past and may still exist at this time, should special education assume it must always exist as a separate delivery system?… Might not special education be in a healthier state if it assumed that its ultimate objective is to work itself out of business as a social institution, to turn over to the regular education mainstream whatever helpful technology it develops so that the handicapped children can be a part of that mainstream? Wouldn't it be remarkable if special education could be a profession not afraid to change and not afraid that its role and livelihood were threatened as the ability of others to deal with individual differences expands? (p. 233)

Hallahan and Kauffman (1994) expressed considerable skepticism about Deno's ideas (which pre-dated Public Law 94–142, now known as IDEA) and suggested that the success of separate special education could actually increase its business. In fact, Deno's propositions (given that her questions would be answered in the affirmative) appear to us to be preposterous. Unfortunately, in our opinion, these propositions have supported the myth that general educators can do in substance and with greater success what special educators have done primarily in form and with less success than desirable. Her ideas imply that the success of special education as a separate entity will make the transformation of general education possible, such that special education is no longer needed. Deno suggests that then special education will have "worked itself out of business." However, as Hallahan and Kauffman (1994) noted, affirmative answers to her questions would be inconsistent with what we know about special and general education.

Deno's ideas put proponents of full inclusion in a logical bind. For, argument that special education of her era was a success and we should now hand off our knowledge and procedures to general education, then the conclusion that separate special education does not work is contradicted. Then, logically, we have returned to our Myths #1 and #6, that restructuring for inclusion is the key to improving schools—that there is really nothing wrong with special education except that it is being done in the wrong place. One supporter of full inclusion (a form of restructuring) wrote this:

> "Place" is the issue… *There is nothing pervasively wrong with special education*. What is being questioned is not the interventions and knowledge that has [sic] been acquired through special education training and research. Rather, what is being challenged is the location where these supports are being provided to students with disabilities. (Blackman, 1992, p. 29, italics in original)

We vehemently disagree with Blackman's view and see it as a kind of myth about special education and restructuring or transformation that others have promoted (e.g., Gartner & Lipsky, 1987, 1989; Lipsky & Gartner, 1996; Sailor & McCart, 2014; Stainback & Stainback, 1991; SWIFT (Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation), 2017). Special education may die among such myths and others. It may shrink to the vanishing point if special education is perceived as something general educators or classroom assistants with a little training can do. Special education may become the first profession—if it is, actually, thought of as a profession different from general education—to make itself obsolete. Perhaps it will be consigned to the junk heap of history, practiced in separate places only by charlatans.

Nevertheless, we hope special education's existence as a legitimate, separate, and valuable entity will not end. We hope its legitimacy will be reaffirmed, its necessity recognized, its focus on effective instruction of individuals sharpened, and its full continuum of alternative placements reclaimed.

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