

Defining | US

PODCAST LEARNING COMPANION

Our podcast companions expand learning beyond the walls of schools and organizations by bringing crucial conversations to the leaders, educators and organizations that matter. Use this guide to promote critical reflection, deeper discussion and meaningful connections among adults and youth around the topics that are Defining US.

VOICES OF CHANGE

A Podcast with Stacey DeWitt

INSIDE EPISODE 15:

"Defining Our Responsibilities to Students with Needs"

Join the conversation as Stacey DeWitt and Troy D. Keller discuss the changed landscape of public education, the educator's role in supporting students more holistically, and why our students with disabilities- and all students- need us to go all in on their behalf.



MEET TROY KELLER:

Since October 2020, Troy has served as a Director of Special Education for Frederick County Public Schools in Frederick, Maryland. Troy has worked with individuals with disabilities for over 15 years and began teaching special education at the age of nineteen in Austin, Texas. To continue his advocacy for individuals with disabilities, specifically individuals with autism and behavior disorders, Troy earned his Master's in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) through Texas State University. In addition to teaching in the public school system, Troy has supported Special Education initiatives in multiple school districts (both urban and suburban in TX, GA, and now MD) as a Behavior Analyst, Autism Supervisor, and Assistant Director of Special Education. These positions have allowed Troy to partner with district and school leaders to create systemic initiatives to deploy evidence-based practices in the areas of behavior, mental health, and academics. This has resulted in narrowing achievement gaps, increasing graduation rates, and addressing the disproportionate representation of marginalized groups in special education. Troy can be reached at TroyDKeller@gmail.com



LISTENING AND REFLECTING

Use this learning companion to dive deeper into the episode topic, with suggestions for asynchronous listening, engagement and experiences that offer opportunities for reflection, connection and commitment.

WAYS TO LISTEN

Use the podcast transcript to increase engagement by following along and highlighting words, phrases, or concepts that stand out in the conversation. Take notes in the margin of reflections, connections and questions and consider these three methods for listening:

1. Open Listening - Listen to the podcast to simply notice and note the words, phrases and moments in the conversation that spark emotion and connections
2. Focused Listening - Listen to the podcast with a focus on the Moments that Matter using the time stamp and topics from the "Podcast Notes"
3. Reflective Listening - Listen to the podcast with a focus on critical self-reflection, using any or all the reflection questions below

CRITICAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR BEFORE AND DURING THE LISTENING

BEFORE YOU LISTEN:

1. What experiences have you had that connect to this topic?
2. What do you hope to learn from listening to this episode?

AS YOU LISTEN:

1. What comes to mind when you think of students with special needs?
2. Do you have any personal experiences connected to schools and students with disabilities? How do your personal experiences influence your response to the ideas mentioned in the podcast?
3. What is the responsibility of public-school systems to ensure equity for all students?
4. What policies have been created to ensure equitable education for all students?
5. What misconceptions do you hold about educating students with special needs?
6. What theories inform your understanding of special needs and disability? What theories inform the policies mentioned in the podcast?
7. What is your practice for labeling and identifying the needs of students/employees, etc.?

AFTERWARDS:

1. What about this discussion resonated with you?
2. What questions or ideas would you like to explore further?
3. What conversations will you have or immediate actions will you take to create change in our own sphere of influence?

EXPERIENCES THAT ELEVATE THE LEARNING

The following experiences are intended for use with leaders, educators, parents and those working in educational organizations. The purpose is to promote critical reflection, connection and commitment toward action. They should be used and adapted based on the individuals, group dynamics and organizational context of the learning.

EXPERIENCES TO PROMOTE CRITICAL SELF-REFLECTION

Reflect on Important Moments in the Conversation

Relisten to one or all of the powerful moments. Use the [podcast notes](#) to find the powerful moments with time stamps. Then write about your own perspective, experience and insights.

- How does your identity, experiences and knowledge influence your understanding of this topic?
- How does this topic connect with your current context?
- What are the implications to your practice?
- How will you continue the conversation in your school/community/organizations?

PERSONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The purpose of this exercise is to reflect on your personal experiences in school and your workplace to critically assess how your past and present needs for support can inform your engagement with advocacy for special needs support in schools. Consider the following:

1. How did you define success in school?
2. What types of support did you use to attain success in school?
3. What support was missing from your experience? How did it impact your performance or progress toward success?

Now consider your experiences in your workplace, profession/career:

4. What support aids your success in a professional environment?
5. How is your performance impacted when you do not have access to the necessary support?
6. How do you advocate for yourself when your needs are not met?

Share your reflections with a partner and discuss how you might empathize with students whose needs are not met by standard schooling practices. What can you apply from your own experiences when trying to support or advocate for students with special needs?

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

Troy Keller talked extensively about the diversity of student needs and the responsibility of schools to ensure a child is available for learning by considering Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (MHN). Troy also acknowledged the unique challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and the strides that schools, parents and guardians have taken in response to novel student needs. The Institution of Education Sciences published a resource linked [here](#) that both explains more about Maslow's hierarchy of needs in relation to student needs, and provides additional support for educators and caregivers seeking to support students enduring the impacts of COVID-19.

Within each category of the MHN pyramid (Basic needs, Safety and well-being, Love and belonging, Self-esteem, and Personal Growth) identify 2-3 items or actions specific to your needs. You may also have your students, employees or colleagues do the same. Identifying your specific needs is the first step in self-advocacy. Next, you may consider what people, places or actions are required for you to meet your identified needs. If there is a breakdown in your success, you may be able to look back at your list and identify what needs were missing to meet your targets or goals.

EXPERIENCES TO PROMOTE BUILDING DEEPER CONNECTIONS BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS AND THE LEARNING

WRAPAROUND SERVICES AND COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

In Keller's episode of the podcast, he expresses the value of wraparound services (psychologist, social worker, counselor, etc.) in caring for the whole child. The Exceptionality Education International journal published an article linked [here](#) that describes how community schools can serve as successful conduits for students to receive the wraparound support that Keller has identified.

The article is a multi-case study of three schools in Canada that function as community schools by providing wraparound services for students identified as having mental health disorders. The article also outlines 10 guiding principles of wraparound that can help in the process of operationalizing the concept in school settings.

1. Read the linked article
2. Identify 3 facts that you learned, 2 ideas or concepts that surprised you, and 1 thing that you still wonder
3. Discuss your list from #2 with a partner
4. Consider how the 10 guiding principles of wraparound may be used in settings outside of schools such as the workplace.

UNDERSTANDING MORE ABOUT THE INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLAN

Keller speaks in depth about the purpose of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Use the timestamps below to revisit the conversation about why attending to needs matters and use this [link](#) to a U.S. News article to learn more about the IEP process.

- 3:19 Vulnerability and Trust
- 7:07 A Whole Child Approach is our Obligation
- 9:15 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Special Needs
- 12:11 A Changed Educational Landscape
- 17:06 Debunking the Myths
- 24:16 Why Attending to Needs Matters
- 28:55 The Continuum of Services is Individualized
- 37:35 Navigating Differences for Full Potential
- 43:05 Equity in the Field
- 54:55 Inclusion Helps All Learn
- 1:02:05 Pearls of the Pandemic

EXPERIENCES TO PROMOTE TAKING ACTION

INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT (IDEA)

Use the information linked [here](#) from the U.S. Department of Education to trace the history of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1990) which was formerly known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975). When reviewing the information on the website, pay close attention to the following information:

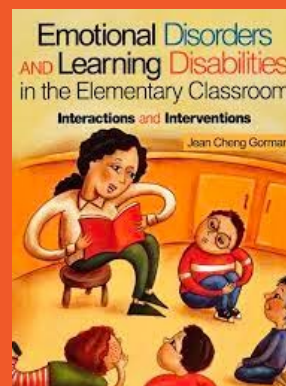
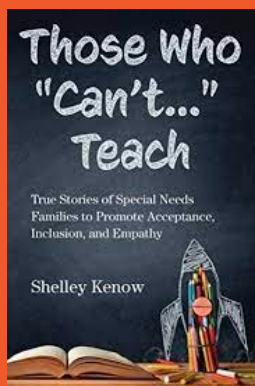
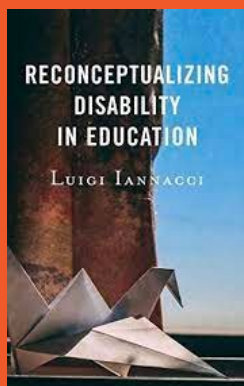
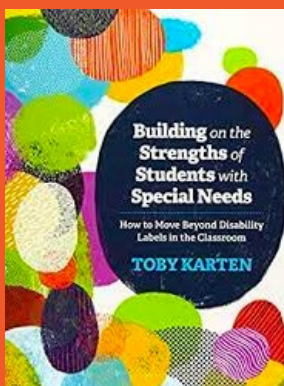
- Revisions that have occurred over the years
- IDEA by State
- IDEA State Contacts

Keller describes that although important changes have been made over time, there is room for improvement. Discuss with a partner or small group what changes you think would support even more inclusion and access for all students.

RETHINKING SPECIAL NEEDS

This podcast episode focuses broadly on meeting each student where they are. Keller provided examples of allowing students to engage in the school environment in ways that support their academic growth, and social and emotional wellbeing. This may include allowing them to take time away from the group if they are overstimulated, have additional time to complete assignments, and demonstrate their learning in a variety of modalities. These accommodations are classified as meeting “special needs” because they vary from the current structure of schooling. What would happen if we reimagined schooling as an inclusive space that accounts for special needs services in its original design? What would be different about the expectations, the environment, the interactions among stakeholders, policies, etc.? Work in a group to design your ideal school or workplace structure that centers inclusivity. From your design, what small changes may be feasible within the structure of your current school or workplace?

INDEPENDENT READING AND BOOK CLUB RECOMMENDATIONS



REFERENCES:

- [Community Schools: What We Know and What We Need to Know The Marva Collins Approach \(1981\)](#)
- [TED Talk: Reimagining Disability and Inclusive Education by Jan Wilson](#)

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