

Genia: Welcome to the Good Things in Life Podcast, the podcast that helps parents support their children with intellectual disabilities to build a good inclusive life and community. I'm your host Genia Stephen. This week's podcast is part of a series about inclusive education. The episode is sponsored by Good Things in Life's upcoming course with Marilyn Dolmage called *Belonging in School: The What, Why and How of Inclusive Education*. You can learn more about this foundations course by going to goodthingsinlife.org/bis for *Belonging in School*. Dr. Kluth is a consultant, teacher, author, advocate, an independent scholar who works with teachers and families to provide inclusive opportunities for students with disabilities and to create more responsive and engaging schooling experiences for all learners. Paula is a former special education teacher who has served as a classroom teacher and an inclusion facilitator. Her professional interests include differentiating instruction, active learning, and inclusive schooling.

Genia: She's the author of numerous books and products including *Universal Design Daily*, *30 Days to the Co-Taught Classroom*, *Don't We Already Do Inclusion?*, *From Text Maps to Memory Caps: 100 More Ways to Differentiate Instruction in K-12 Inclusive Classrooms*, and *You're Going To Love This Kid!* Paula is also the director of a documentary film titled *We Thought You'd Never Ask: Voices of People With Autism*. Today, I'm talking with Paula about her book, *Don't We Already Do Inclusion?* I love this. I think that the book is really helpful. The concepts are really provocative and really important. Now, you'll hear at the beginning of the interview that the, it's a little bit scratchy. Stay with it. It evens out, the quality evens out I promise. Let's get right into it.

Genia: Paula Kluth, thank you so much for joining me today on the Good Things in Life Podcast. I'm thrilled that you're here. Good morning.

Paula: Good morning and thank you for having me. I'm really excited we have been able to connect.

Genia: Yeah, me too. Me Too. I wonder if you could start, Paula by talking a little bit about yourself, introducing yourself and explaining what your relationship has been with people with disabilities and their families.

Paula: Oh, I'd love to. I am a former school teacher, so my background in this work comes from teaching kids with and without disabilities. I was a teacher in both of the high school and elementary school. And I went on to become a, you know, have various roles, an inclusion facilitator. I work a little bit on adult services, went back to school and was a university professor. And in all of these roles on [inaudible], most recently I've been working as a consultant. I've left being a professor, I've been gone for quite a few years. [inaudible] consultation with schools and with family organizations roles. You know, the work has been driven by the words and experiences and the teaching the people with disabilities and their families. And it goes all the way back to, you know, my very first years as a teacher.

Paula: So much of what I learned, I mean I certainly had, you know, value my education and, you know, thought the course work was helpful, but nothing really compared to and being very patiently supported by families and by people with disabilities. And one of

several families, especially in my first year, who took me under their [inaudible], really, well that's really helpful for me because [inaudible] had moved away pretty far away from any home [inaudible]I, we, we would do IEP meetings in people's living rooms. And I did plenty of home [inaudible], I think in part because a lot of families were so, you know, [inaudible] and be heard. And I felt the [inaudible] really happy to work with families who so wanted to embrace the collaboration. And I would, you know, [inaudible] I guess opens the wrong word, but really, you know, energized by the educational, those kind of more informal educational experiences.

Paula: I was not shy about asking questions. I was at first, cause I didn't want to look incompetent, but later on, you know, that became such a tool in my own education was just to ask question to really, you know, use the, the generosity of spirit and the teachings of folks that I was, you know, in air quotes "supporting". That was just so illuminating. So, later on when I was writing and I was teaching, I just always continued to put that at the heart of the work, which I think the field I think has done and in many cases may at least the scholars I am interested in and in the work [inaudible] then it has been the, this, the words and the experiences of people with disabilities and their families, that have been the most central to my own work and has been most inspirational for me as a teacher.

Genia: Yeah. It's interesting what you're saying about the being open to asking questions and that that being, that that was sort of a journey, you know, for you that it wasn't totally the case. One of the things that I, when I'm talking to parents about working with school teams, one of the things that I often encourage is for people to assume good intent and to forgive in advance and to say, you know, "We're figuring this out. I know you don't have all the answers and that's okay. I really want to figure it out with you." You know, so letting people know that you, that you don't expect everybody to have all the answers all the time. And that, that, that doesn't mean that you respect them any less, skilled educators and team members.

Paula: Yeah. You know what, I hate to interrupt, but I just, I had a wonderful, one of my many wonderful mentors and that'll, you know, hope, I hope many listeners may know is a woman named Anne Dolan who was a professor of mine in undergraduate and later in graduate school. And she used to say just that, whether as a researcher or as a practitioner that it's okay to say, I don't know. And that's not always, you know, sometimes that is shocking for folks to hear. It's like, "Oh, I can say that." And, and actually I think you're absolutely right. Genia but sometimes people will respect you more if you say, I don't know. Let's, let's investigate this together. Let's look at this.

Genia: Yeah. One of the things that really tipped the scales in my experience for myself as far as trusting the school team was when they came to me and said, "We've discovered that something's been going terribly wrong and, and we wanted to, you know, tell you all about it and tell you, and have you help us figure out what to do next." And that, you know, just that the fact that they were willing to do that, and I think, you know, that was not early in our, early in our school experiences. You know, we were been working with the team for a while. But still that kind of, the willingness to say, "I don't know", but also "We messed up" is really powerful I think in establishing trust relationship.

Paula: No doubt about it.

Genia: So Paula, let's talk about your book, Don't We Already Do Inclusion? I love the title. [inaudible] the title is, you know, it's really provocative. And I think it, I'm, I imagine that part of the reason for that title is the recognition that people are not always sure really what inclusion is, but I'd love to hear your, your thoughts. Where did the title come from and what does it mean?

Paula: Yeah, well, you hit it on the head. It means a few different things, but one of them definitely is this idea, you know, are you talking about what I'm talking about? What is inclusion? And also an acknowledgement that that folks may think this is a set of behaviors or this is, you know, it's a trajectory of training or it's, you know, some skills that, that we, we learned about one time and now we're done with it. And it actually came from, I think, you know, it was probably a moment that was intended to be humorous, but as an administrator said to me, you're here again. You know, we already, we did that last year, we did inclusion last year. I think we're doing multicultural things this year, you know. And I mean probably [inaudible], but you know, it had been, there had been enough in spirit that, you know, around those themes that I thought right, this idea that, "Oh we've already covered that.

Paula: And for me too, I think it was a bit of a, it was a time for me to, when I was writing it, I was thinking, you know, it's time for me to come back to it too because I had kind of had that attitude. I had written early on in my career about inclusion and I had done inclusion workshops. Like this is what inclusion is and here are the related behaviors and here are the, some of the strategies. And then I thought to myself, okay, we all know what that is. Erroneously, I thought that, and we all have that basis. Now it's time, cause people would say, "Okay, get on with it, get on with it. How does it look?" So then I wrote a book about co-teaching and I wrote a book about universal design for learning. And I wrote books about, you know, about the, you know, classroom, teaching strategies broadly.

Paula: And, I thought, okay, this is what people really need. And then, you know, a couple of years ago, I just started to notice that I do need to return to my roots. I do need to talk more probably about inclusion against, because A, yes, all the different interpretations of what is inclusion to you. And B, things have evolved in that time. You know, I'm almost 50 years old. So, when I started out what we thought was high quality inclusion is not what we think is high quality inclusion today for very good reason. So, I really wanted to speak to that and I wanted to talk about, you know, even if you, you know, if somebody said to me, you know, I, you, I was their professor when they were a young teacher, you know, when they were a new teacher. And I said, well, I hope that you aren't still following the advice that I gave way back then.

Paula: Even though it was me. And you know, you, you, you, you're interested in my work. I hope that you're, you know, that you're evolving. And my own thinking has evolved as well. For example, I think my expectations for all students have changed and I understand what's possible not only as kids get more access to inclusive environments, but also because technology evolves and the research is illuminating and all those kinds

of things. So, it was really a, you know, a return to the roots, so to speak. And it's been really delightful to have some of these conversations.

Genia: I wonder if you could talk a bit about just what you were saying about how, sorry. I'm fumbling here a little bit because my head is swirling with some, some thoughts. So, I've, I've been in the world of inclusive education my entire educational life because I have a sister that's three years younger than I am that has an intellectual disability. And so, you know, 30, 38 years ago, I guess, or maybe 35 years ago, my family was fighting just for an inclusive placement, you know, so we kind of early days where there were still lots of human rights cases and, you know, everybody really just trying to get a placement.

Paula: Right.

Genia: So, I remember the conversations there and at that point there was still a thought that inclusion really was a placement decision.

Paula: Right.

Genia: We know of course now that just having a child in a room is not inclusion. So I'm, and I'm thinking about what all the listeners, all the different versions of inclusion that the listeners might have or ideas around inclusion that the listeners might have at that they may not even know they have. Because just like you're saying, we kind of think we've got that without really necessarily unpacking it. So, I wonder if you could talk a bit about what does that look like? What does inclusion look like? If you were to sort of sketch it out, you know, and we know that the, I'm not talking about the how, but what does it look like? How do you define?

Paula: And there's, and, and I want to add to at the end of this, um, about some things that are, as you said about, people may not understand that full picture today. Some things that are not inclusion. I think that's also important to talk about.

Genia: Yeah. Right.

Paula: Right. So, I think one of the things that, you know, for me, inclusion, you know, one of the big misconceptions for me is that inclusion is about square peg round hole. That like as you said, getting kids to have to, kids have to be in those environments. Everyone's, you know, sitting in their seat facing forward so to speak. And I have a student that does, that you know, is not capable of that, has all kinds of struggles and therefore, you know, you're just making somebody fit into a model that is maybe, maybe it's even inhumane because you know, the, the student requires movement or the student requires a different way of learning.

Paula: And it's, it's not educationally sound. So, I always say, you know, what we're looking for is preferred environments. I'm sorry. What we're looking for is environments where kids with and without disabilities are being educated together. We are looking for students getting, you know, since special ed education is that a place we're looking for students getting their supports and services inside of those spaces. And inside of those

experiences, there's inclusive classrooms and those inclusive learning experiences including related services. Inclusion is also about, you know, as a mindset. It's also about students having experiences that are only as special as necessary. And I'm going to give some qualifiers around that, but it's a mindset about, you know, from the time that students arrive until the time that they leave. Thinking about how we design the entire day. So, I, you know, in the book I talk about things like, you know, I am, part of the reason for the book is I was visiting inclusive schools and I put that in air quotes "because of this example". But where kids with disabilities would arrive in the morning and all the other kids are playing on the playground and all the kids with disabilities would arrive on specialized transportation and come into the school early to get set up and sometimes even go into a special room and kids would all get, you know, maybe they would take some time to get a picture schedule set up or somebody would get into a stand or whatever was needed.

Paula: But, I just remember being at that school and saying, how come every single kid using specialized transportation had to come in early? And they said, oh, we just give them, we give, we give them, we just give him time to get set up. And I said, you know, if kids do need time to get set up, they absolutely should get it. If you really do need more time to eat your breakfast, then you should come in early, if that's necessary. Absolutely. Do need to be in a space where kids are not bumping into you to get your schedule set up and get into your classroom. You should get it. But just because you arrived in specialized transportation and have a certain label, it doesn't mean that you should come in early. And that's that the, it's a micro example of something that's more special than it needs to be.

Paula: You should get what you need and that, what everybody else gets with the same perceived ability level or, or, or, or label. And so, I always talk about, you know, every time they all do anything, whether that's kids on the autism spectrum or kids with Down syndrome or kids with learning disabilities, but every time they all do everything, you've lost the I in IEP.

Genia: Yeah.

Paula: And it's, there's a lot of those little moments in schools where that's an inclusive school, but that's, that's not inclusive so that if you need a specialized support, we provide it for you. But if you don't, then you should be doing what other kids are doing. And that means you should be outside playing on the playground. Even to the point, I was just talking to a young lady this weekend with cerebral palsy and we were, I was talking about that example and I was saying, you know, we should be able to, we should be, if we're not there moving towards kneeling school buses.

Paula: Cause I'm sure we're, you know, in many cases, we are, kids with disabilities are taking the transportation that their neighbors are taking in their siblings and that should be able to include kids with complex needs and kids with physical disabilities. So, even going back to that very example of kids and specialized transportation, we want to see those models evolve as well. So, that inclusion is from the moment that you leave your home. I'll hope in your home as well. And then from a school he experienced, I should be all day long. So you know, it is about, you know, considering all that's happening in

those, you know, kind of like that, you know, our, our traditional definition of, as you said, the inclusive classroom, that those experiences are, are varied and appropriately challenging that you get your supports and your services. But it's also about this broader context of what is inclusion. And as you so elegantly brought up as well, just because you're in that space doesn't mean it's inclusive.

Paula: So, the other part of inclusion and this kind of push back on this criticism of round peg square hole is that sometimes it will look very different for different kids. So, you know, it may mean that when I talk about preferred environments or material, environments that all kids get to access. In some cases, I mean, I'm working with a student in the high school where that student has a very different looking schedule. He, he goes to a double period for lunch because it takes him so long to eat. And then the second period, he actually gets some peer tutoring right inside the cafeteria. He has in the past, he's not getting it now, but in the past he's had physical education twice a day because of a body that does not always work well for him and really a lot of need for movement.

Paula: I've had kids where we've had, you know, we've had them, I mean all kinds of permutations of this take classes that are intended for students who are a little bit older, even enrichment classes just because we feel that though that that material for some reason as a special interest of the students. So, even jumping over tracks and doing really unique things. So, in a second grade classroom I was in, I, I wrote, I wrote, I wrote about a kid in a different book where he, when he first came to school, he was so active. So, we always went to physical education with every single, you know, second grade classroom. So, it's inclusion. He's not doing exactly what his class "is doing". But he's going into spaces that are for general and special education students. He's, if he needs something a bit different to do some studying or to do some, you know, he needs to do some quiet work. Maybe he can do that in a, in the, in the school library that we want to keep kids in classrooms, in educational environments where there are kids with and without disabilities receiving those educational services. And um, and so that can look very different for different kids. We may get creative, but we want to keep those markers in place that these are valued environments for. All

Genia: Right. And when you were talking about how your perspective or your insight into inclusive education has evolved over time. One of the things you said is that watching the kids and, and what, um, what the kids are doing and how the kids are, I can't remember exactly how you said it, but what I, what I heard, which may not have been what you said, but what I heard was essentially the better we get at inclusion, the more kids thrive. Now. You definitely didn't use those words, but yeah. I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about that. Like what do you see happening for kids when inclusion has done well?

Paula: Well, I didn't exactly say that, but I do believe it. Um, and you're right. Um, I see what happens. You know that there has been a lot of changes in the field since I've been in it. Um, we have had, we have seen the emergence of this thing called universal design for learning, which essentially, you know, instead of saying, let's adapt for a couple of kids who may need something different, let's look at classrooms and learning experiences and say, "How can this from the get go from the ground up, be more accessible to all learners?" So that's been really exciting and I think we've seen kids be able to thrive in

those environments when we see that there's more choice available when technology is personalized. I mean, Gosh, I never thought I'd see the day all of these kids with the look we're walking around with little computers in their hands.

Paula: I couldn't have imagined that even when I came out in the field so that the text can be exactly right for me. And without a teacher having to cut and paste, literally cut and paste as I did to make them, to make the, the, the textbook, uh, right for you. Um, we see that, um, the evolution of the things like, uh, you know, well, I mean, touch screen, the only the iPad came out. I can't tell you how many emails I got. And um, you know, just phone calls from parents and teachers and um, you know, just individuals with disabilities themselves. I mean, people were saying, you're not going to believe this kid that we have known for years. He's much more competent than we thought he was. And now we have the iPad and you can communicate in this way or that way.

Paula: Well, I mean that's just the tip of the iceberg of what we're going to see in technology. So that has changed what we thought was possible for individuals. And then I think, you know, the other piece that's changed a lot is that the research itself has shown us that kids are capable of so much more, they do better when they are inside inclusive classrooms. And that in turn, I think, I hope, uh, at least based on the numbers that we're seeing has, has, uh, has encouraged us to move forward, to be bolder with, um, our, the work and inclusive schools to include a wider range of kids. And, and they keep surprising us. I mean, when we begin, we do more and more of that and, and we get, we keep being surprised in all the best ways. So, um, we, you know, I, I think that's, that that's going to continue to change.

Paula: You're going to see that in the, you know, the last say, four or five decades of research, if they've shown us every, anything they've shown us that our expectations have never been high enough. And I think that is true today. And we're starting to see the very first graduate. Uh, I mean, and then not saying individuals, but I mean larger groups of kids who had been included throughout their school career and they do look different. Um, they have had different opportunities. Um, I think you'll see, you know, literacy levels will look different. Job opportunities are gonna look different. Social relationships are looking different. People are getting married, people are going to college. We just didn't see that. And some of these things, presuming competence all the way through, so much of this is surprising to me. So I just cannot wait for the next, you know, the next a collection of surprises.

Paula: They're coming. And they've been delightful, um, and, um, you know, expend a really exquisite, I mean to see what happens when you give kids these expectations and then pair them with, um, rich and inappropriate learning experiences. You know, and I always say, if you think that you've, um, you know, if, if you think, you know, we've sort of seen this tipping point, we haven't even begun to see what is possible, not just because of the expectations rising, but again, because of the field itself, what's happening in, um, in technology, what's happening in the design of curriculum. And I think even the, the changing and the expectations of schools themselves, you know, we are going to have a really a personalized approach to educating kids that's only started right now. Um, but that we are going to be able to give kids what they need in ways that we previously couldn't have. And I think that's gonna change a lot of the landscape as well.

Genia: So, where does your, where does your book fit into that vision of sort of a, of a, um, exciting, exciting future with, you know, even more, um, unforeseen successes and, and growth? Where does your work contribute?

Paula: Um, you know, the, the book is really meant to, it's very action oriented. So I mean, some of the steps are really sort of about this, you know, raise your expectations. I mean, one of the simplest things that I say that just in the book, but when I'm presenting and teaching is that it isn't enough. You know, we presume competence is such a big, um, you know, it's such a guide, guide, guiding light or guideposts of our work today. And you know, that I love that. I love that we talk about, um, you know, the idea of a holding those high expectations, but we can't talk about that in a vacuum. And so what I always, I always ask teachers, you know, raise your hand if you have high expectations for all kids. And of course everybody raises their hand. And I say, well, you know, of course you're not going to, especially if you're, you're principal's here, you're not going to not raise your hand to make that joke.

Paula: But I say, if you really believe that, and then you look at the research that we have on inclusive education, then having high expectations means that you will advocate for inclusion. That's what it means. And so if you handed the race and you are not a staunch advocate advocate for inclusive education, um, then there is a, there is a disconnect here between your beliefs, um, and you know, the appropriate practice and you need to remedy that because it's not just about hope, it's we know what to do, we know what to do. We know kids need access to those experiences and those spaces. So that's one thing. The book is really meant to have that action orientation. So when I went back and I used that example from that school, um, where the kids are on the playground and some of the kids were going in early, I thought there's a lot of sort of micro moments.

Paula: Where kids, even in inclusive schools are not getting the experience that's most appropriate. So here's a hundred little behaviors that we can engage in and the book's broken down into classroom. 25 ideas for classroom, 25 ideas for schools, 25 ideas for districts, 25 ideas for communities. And basically I want PTOs and steering committees and teacher teams and book clubs to sit down with that book and everybody pick some ideas. Let's pick some ideas and let's start, um, plugging away at how do we can, how we can create change if our hand is in the air and we, we know we're saying we have high expectations for all kids, then we have to look at these all the way across the school day and through the school year. What can we do to create, um, you know, experiences that are, um, more robust and create a classroom that rise up to meet the needs of these kids and to push ourselves forward and thinking about inclusion with a capital I.

Paula: And what I mean by that is that it's not just about disability either. And we talk about inclusion today, right? We mean race, we're talking about gender identity, we're talking about families, newcomers, immigrants. How, how are we doing as a school to really be inclusive? So even if we do all the best things for kids with disabilities, we are not meeting the promise of inclusive education. If we have massive, you know, opportunity gaps. Um, and if we have, if kids, you know, families don't feel welcome, for example, so, um, all families. So, so that was really my intention is to say, if you really feel you don't know how to make this happen, whether you're a parent, whether you're an

occupational therapist in the school, whether you're the librarian, here are a hundred ideas, pick one. Or pick them off or pick every single one.

Genia: So do you see in your work schools that really are, um, achieving capital I inclusion?

Paula: I work with a lot of schools that are, had that as a goal. Um, you know, this is a thing. I don't know that it's, um, you know, I think it's a, it's the work that we do. Um, you know, I think that the, the minute I, this sounds, I don't want this to sound negative, but I want it to sound positive, but it's not a place that we go with the work that we do. So I don't know that, you know, if there's, if there are schools that would say we did it. We, you know, um, you know, this has been actualized. We've got it all together. It, like you said earlier, which was, that was beautifully said. You know, this idea that you're always kind of striving, you're always moving towards this. Um, and I, so I think it's understanding that this is a commitment that schools have to make every day.

Paula: Um, and probably some schools feel like on some days they have it, they're nailing it and you know better than they are on other days. Um, I know lots of schools that are making really fantastic efforts on a regular basis and understand these intersections. Um, and I think, um, probably, you know, in the, I, I, you said earlier that you felt so much, um, satisfaction in a strange sense when the teacher said something's gone wrong. I feel the same way about schools. If they say, "Oh, we've done it, we're inclusive, we've solved the problem." I think, "O-oh". Um, where I'd rather hear that, you know, like every day this is the commitment that we make. And I think it's hard to do. I think it's hard to do well. Um, folks saying, "We have a lot of work to do", and I say, "Good for you. That's the best place you can be and keep striving." You know, this is the work we do every single day.

Genia: What really interests me about this and the reason I asked the question is because, you know, we have decades and decades and decades of research that shows that inclusive education benefits all children,

Paula: Right.

Genia: That's even though nobody's doing it perfectly.

Paula: Right.

Genia: It just speaks in a really positive way to me about, about the value of, um, what can be achieved even when you never arrive. But you're, you're just working on it. Like the, and I think for educators and for families, um, it can, it can be demoralizing, you know, because it is hard. It's really hard to, to, to make it work. And as you said it, you know, some days are better than others. Um, but just the effort itself according to the research makes a difference. Really makes a difference.

Paula: That's right. And having that mindset, which is, you know, growth mindset is very big here at American school. I think it has taken up and you know, in Canada and, and, and, and your, and other places as well. But this idea that we're not there yet um, but my

mindset is this is where I'm headed and I'm going to increasingly, you know, try to acquire those skills. And I mean, I remember when that first hit, when Carol [inaudible] work, um, on mindset first hit, I, my kids were getting worksheets and all kinds of materials weekly about, you know, changing their mindset and getting into a growth mindset. And I just remember one day that, based on my child's school, but I remember thinking like, you'll know school should get to talk about growth mindset with kids if they're not inclusive. Um, you know, if, don't tell me that you can't include a kid and then sent home growth mindset worksheets to your students.

Paula: Um, you know, this is, this is exactly the mindset we need to have, which is, you know, if we don't know how to do this, we have to figure this out. If we don't know, we don't have resources for those kinds of kids, we need to figure that out. We need to get those resources. But that's really important. And the other thing I think is, you know, I am so sensitive to the fact that, you know, when I share all that research, I just say, do I think this is easy? No. I think it's hard and it's demoralizing when we see teachers leaving the profession in droves. Um, you know, we have a "teacher shortage" here. Um, well a lot of people are saying it's not a shortage. We have plenty of teachers. They just, they just don't want to work in these conditions.

Paula: They need more pay, they need more resources. They need to be treated professionally. And the only thing I can say is that I, you know, I do wish that we had more support for teachers. But the good news I will say about, uh, doing this work is that we have to, we have no choice but to collaborate and education these days. And because it is a lonely profession and because it is hard work um, the good news is that, you know, the goals that we have around equity and goals that we have around inclusive education, all of these things do require that we work together and we can lean on each other. So these kinds of movements are all intersecting. They are not different. Uh, you know, if to say, yeah, this is another, it's another thing on my plate. It's the same, it's all the same plate.

Paula: I mean we're looking at trying to make sure that all kids achieve at high levels the same kinds of practices that we are interested in and invested in for inclusive education or the same kinds of practices we should be invested in for school improvement for all. Um, so that's the kind of good news is that it is hard work and we need each other more than ever. Um, we need to draft off of each other's expertise more than ever. So those are gifts that inclusive education actually bring to us, and we should be exploiting those kinds of things. I don't think it's easy and I don't think it's, there's enough probably education and support available in all places for all teachers. Um, but I do think that if we, if we can continue to move in this direction and, you know, and if this moves us out of silos and gets us into cooperation with one another, there's all kinds of great benefits we're going to see, not just for kids with and without disabilities. Um, but for all kids and quite frankly for teachers, because I think there is a lot of isolation cells in the field and I think there is a lot of struggle in learning some of these new competencies. So we're going to have to not only learn, learn from each other, we're going to have to start, you know, uh, probably doing more collaborative teaching and, um, and collaborative planning up maybe more than we ever have. And those can actually reap some other sort of lovely benefits.

Genia: Right. Yeah. It's interesting. I love, and I'm excited that we've reached a point in which thinking about inclusive education and, um, related to disability really is being recognized at least by some people in some circles as the, um, as the model really for addressing all kinds of issues within our community around, um, you know, just community development and, uh, inclusivity. And so, you know, you listed a bunch of, um, a bunch of identity related, um, and experience related with that that can leave people feeling, um, excluded from their communities. And meaning that we, we don't, as communities, we don't get their gifts, they don't get to contribute their gifts, which means their, we, you know, we're at a, at a deficit here. So, I love that, you know, as other, um, social justice movements have moved forward, we've really seen the, the negative impacts of, um, discrimination on the dominant culture.

Genia: Not because people are denied the opportunity to contribute and be meaningful members of their community. And that recognition is now happening around disability. I don't think it's particularly pervasive, that recognition, that's not experience. But I do feel like it's an exciting, um, it's an exciting thing that there is some recognition of it. And when I think, again, over my, my lifetime, um, I now have a 13 year old son that has disabilities um, but I've been around thinking about these issues for a really long time. One of my frustrations is often why are we still having the same conversations now that my parents were having 40 years ago?

Paula: Yeah.

Genia: But this there, but there are some, some pieces that come through where I think that that's different. That's, that's different.

Paula: Right.

Genia: Yeah.

Paula: Yeah. And I, and I actually think even, you know, in [inaudible], it's so slow changing that, that that's what's hard about it. And so it can be hard to kind of listen carefully and say, okay, well maybe there is some evolution there. Um, and I think not just in beliefs, I think, you know, the practices will also drive that. So I think that how we think about the classroom has changed too. Even though it can be hard to perceive. So I do think the intersections of, you know, how we do this work and why we do this work and intersections of, you know, different, um, uh, in, you know, there's always a, you know, what is the hot topic in education today? But I do, I actually do think that used to be about, "Oh, it's multicultural education", you know, here that we're going to focus on this. I do think that is evolved quite a bit and as you said, um, that we're having conversations that are, um, kind of constantly intersecting and you know, we're not thinking about these things as one-offs.

Paula: Um, so I think that's helpful. May not be perfect, but it's evolving in that direction. And then at the same time, I also think that the practices are evolving too. Like I, you know, I, I just was thinking the other day how unusual I was giving the example of how hard it is to adapt when the teacher is lecturing all day or their kids are always in a whole class

discussion, how hard it is to adapt anything. And I used to give that example and uh, people would kind of like sigh heavily, you know? Yes. So true. But now, you know, I realize, uh, in talking to teachers, even though it's, you know, some places, especially with high school, it's changing slowly. It is unusual to be in classrooms where, you know, there aren't small groups often, you know, working together with kids don't have some kind of project going on where there is an agency and personalization and kids are accessing materials in different ways.

Paula: I mean, I just went to my own child's, um, high school, uh, back to school night and the desks were all sort of, uh, the furniture was arranged so that kids could easily get into groupings. And I'm like, you know, that's, that's, I don't know if it's the norm, but I mean, it's definitely moving to being, certainly not unusual at all.

Genia: Right.

Paula: And so those are things in my career that have changed a lot that we didn't see the desk swinging around easily so that kids could go into these group kinds of discussions. And, you know, we certainly didn't have the technology so that students could create all this whole range of interesting products together or separately. The different ways in which kids are being assessed, that's evolving pretty quickly. Um, the different ways that we would teach kids. You know, the round Robin reading was still a thing when I was even a new principal, we still saw that that would be so unusual to walk into a classroom.

Paula: So, I mean, the beliefs are changing and quite frankly, the practices really are evolving into, um, you know, and into, uh, you know, new faces and new expectations. Um, so that, you know, there is room for diversity and in those old ways of teaching and learning, uh, that were heavily teacher driven, it was very hard to find this basis for a diverse learner or how we might have different kids may get different things. So yeah, it creeps along sometimes and then all of a sudden you, you know, you've turn around and you say, "Oh yeah, there's movement." And that, that's satisfying.

Genia: Yeah. It's very satisfying and very hopeful.

Paula: Yeah.

Genia: Yup. Um, so Paula, who is your book for? Who's the book written for?

Paula: Well, it's definitely, um, you know, it's an attempt to reach every stakeholder that's involved in inclusive education. But the, um, I think most of the ideas can be used by almost any stakeholder. So if you're a school principal, you could probably make all hundred of those ideas happen in one year, way, shape or form. However, the 25 ideas that are, uh, highlighted for community, those were more intended that things that maybe if you were a part of a parent teacher organization or if you were, um, you know, part of an advocacy group, um, those, you may not be able to impact the 25 classroom ideas as much but, um, yeah, those 25 ideas in the community section are definitely things that you could have some control over and tried to drive or direct. So I, even

though I spliced teachers, you know, loosely teachers are, you know, that can, can sort of think about those things in the schools, in this classrooms, chapter a section.

Paula: And that's, you know, maybe admin administrators might think about the school ideas and district folks could think about district. There's a ton of overlap. So everything from, um, and again, you know, really it talks about not just school. So it's everything from if you really want to have inclusion, you have to go and you have to massage and celebrate the businesses in your community that hire your graduates, um, from your inclusive schools to talking to your community library about how inclusive the library is to, um thinking about what is your spelling me, you know, how, how inclusive are, is your, um, field day or all those kind of extra curriculum. So it kind of looks at every aspect and says, just take bite-size, you know, pieces and just try to chip away at those as a way into helping people understand and interrogate the larger thing that is inclusive education.

Paula: So it's my hope that, you know, a student council could take, you know, many of these on. And I've made that suggestion many times. Um, you know, that there are items here that definitely almost any stakeholder group could examine. So that's the hope is that there's something for everybody. And, and I tell folks, you know, this is, uh, not a, I'm not, I mean, there are things you can do on your own, but it really is also designed like get out there with partners in groups and, you know, take this on together. And because it's my hope that not only is this something we can do collaboratively, but that as we've said earlier, that these ideas will address those intersections. That this is not just about supporting, if you will, 10 to 20% of the population. This is really about all kids and all communities.

Genia: Right. Um, and it sounds like there would be a lot of content in the book that would be really relevant to parents who are committed to creating an inclusive life for their child, both in and outside of school.

Paula: Yeah. That was the intention. It was because, because I was, I was speaking to so many family groups. I'm like, well, what can we do? And I said, listen, as a parent myself, I have faced those meetings. I have cried in my kitchen. I have felt powerless. Um, I don't have children with disabilities, but I'm an advocate and I want the things that a lot of my colleagues and friends want that had children with disabilities. And, um, I've been turned down for every [inaudible] you could imagine. So I have fought through my PTO. I have fought through up, you know, parent groups. I have fought through as an individual, you know, room mother. I mean, you know, every, every place that you can think of. Maybe fighting's not the right word, but I have tried to create change, um, in all of these ways. And I'm not saying there's any one that has been more effective than the other. I think they're all necessary. It's a big, it's big work.

Genia: So if you are a parent who feels like they are in a state of fighting, you know, um, we can cut, we can think of a different, different words. You know, they're there to advocate. They're, they're crying in their kitchen or they're just feeling really, really uncertain about whether or not, um, you know, when they're, when they're thinking about where their child will go to school and what school will look like for their child, they're just feeling a little bit uncertain about whether or not pushing for inclusion is the

right way to go. Um, what advice do you, or maybe advice is not the right, I don't want to frame what you're going to say, but why should parents, those, those parents who are feeling nervous or one out, why should they feel confident that I'm choosing a vision of inclusive education is absolutely the right way to go?

Paula: Well, I mean, there's so many reasons and truly that question could be another whole podcast, right? Cause it's so rich. Um, but I will say this and it's probably similar to what, uh, to your own feelings and what other folks have said is that we just don't have any research that suggests that other placements even come close. That [inaudible] not only have we found expectations have been too low. Uh, but we have found that pulling kids out of these, you know, they're, they're neighborhood schools and pulling kids out of general education classrooms, um, has not offered us this promise of, you know, being more specialized or being safer or being more of a community. And in fact, what we have found is that, um, students do better academically when they're included. We find that, um, they do better as it relates to related skills. In other words, the IEP, they do better on their IEP objectives. It's hard to learn social skills outside of the social context. It's hard to learn communication skills outside of being, having lots of competence, authentic communication partners. Um, it is kids do better if they have more robust friendship networks when they're included. Um, and we could go on and on. Um, but what we know is that, um, you know, the, this trajectory, this narrative is only going to become, um, heartier.

Paula: I mean, we have a study coming out in 2020. No, it couldn't come up yet this year. I shouldn't assume to say that by Sandy Cole out of Indiana. To my knowledge, it's not published yet. And we have a yet another study where she [inaudible] developmental twins. She looks at kids who were and were not included. Um, and she got data from the state of Indiana and looked at those test scores and she found that overwhelmingly kids who were included did better. So, um, you know, I don't, I don't envy somebody that has to, as we say, fight, advocate, whatever, however you want to say it, it has to go through this process where it doesn't feel comfortable or even feels horrible. However, I can only say what I, what I say to teachers, it's harder to say to a parent because, um, you know, it's just, it's 24 hours and it is their life.

Paula: But I always say to teachers, this is hard work, but we know it's better. And once you have this in front of you, so, you know, I know it's really hard, but our hands are tied. Now that we know what's better, this is the work that we have to do. For families, I think that they have to do what they can do um, in this way of advocacy, but I'll say something else to kind of soften that blow. Cause I think it is hard to say that to a family who's trying to live their life and make dinner and everything else is, it's really important to remember, you know, I've had this mom come to my conference and she, her daughter was 17 years old and she was just so upset because like the ship had kind of, she felt the ship had sailed for her daughter.

Paula: She did end up going back and getting some inclusive experiences later. But I said, listen, inclusion is not about just school. Inclusion is a church. Inclusion is work. Inclusion is family reunions. Inclusion is, you know, when you're at the playgroup. So it's never, it's never too late and it's never too early. And let's just say something happen in perfectly at middle school. You know, there's always another best to hear. Like it's, this is just life

goes on and so does inclusion and, um, there's always new opportunities. So, you know, you can't always control what you have in front of you at any one moment. You know, tried to get your kid included in boy scouts and that didn't work out and it can feel terrible, but there's always another opportunity for this. So, um, we didn't feel like, oh my gosh, my child's leaving school and it didn't happen. Life does go on and so do inclusive opportunities. And, um, and we're hoping that for parents, uh, you know, that, that this only gets easier as everybody wakes up to what families have always known.

Genia: Excellent. Thank you. Paula, if people wanted to learn more about you and your work, how would people find you?

Paula: We have sort of a one stop shop. There's lots of different, you know, products and things like that, but there, you know, even I forget sometimes the right title for things. So the website's the one stop to kind of find all of this information. So it's just my name, my websites, my name, um, and it's paulakluth.com. And there are lots of free articles over there. Um, we have, um, a tip of the day on the website. Um, and I have a youtube channel too, which is somewhat new. So if you'd rather listen versus read. Um, there's all kinds of free videos out there. And I do a couple a year, I have a series called Off the Page where I explain some of these ideas about, um, inclusion and related practices. Um, so you can look at Paula Kluth is the name of the channel for that. I have a Facebook page, you know, social media, Twitter.

Paula: So there's lots of places to learn and, and I encourage people if they want to read, I have lots of books on this topic. Go to your public libraries, that's what they're there for. Um, so you don't have to go and buy a bunch of resources, go to your public libraries and have those, you know, secure those resources because I want them in everybody's hands and not just, you know. But tending is an advocating, you does not always extra money for books.

Genia: Right. Yeah.

Paula: So there's lots of ways to get information and nobody should feel like they have to go and buy a library to get it.

Genia: Excellent. Well, I'll make sure that the link to your website and your social media accounts are in the show notes and the show notes and can be found at goodthingsinlife.org/039. Paula, thank you so much. It's been a real pleasure speaking with you today. I'm really grateful.

Paula: Thank you. I'm, I'm glad we finally got to connect and thank you for all you're doing to get this information to families. Um, you know, as my, my dear friend and colleague Patrick Shores always says families are the gold standard and uh, and it is one group that doesn't get all the support that they need either. So thank you for what you're doing. I sure do appreciate it.

Genia: Thank you.

Genia: Well that was pretty great ey? I really enjoyed my conversation with Dr. Kluth. Now there are a number of opportunities coming out from Good Things in Life that I want to tell you about around inclusive education. On November 24th, Norman Kunc and Emma Van Der Klift are giving a free online presentation called You can't learn to swim in the parking lot of the pool! And this provocative conversation about education and opportunity will really, I think, stretch your imagination and really brings some things into clear focus around inclusive education and around opportunities and high expectations for kids with disabilities. It's going to be great. Plus Emma and Norm are really funny, um, and great storytellers. So it's also going to be really entertaining. You can find out about that at goodthingsinlife.org. And then on September 30th, there's another live free event by Erin Sheldon called Helping students with disabilities to belong in school: Understanding what it means to be a student.

Genia: And in this presentation, Erin is going to talk about how we can understand what, what is a student. You know, and how do all kids fill that role of student and how you can help kids to belong and be accepted for who they are, both sort of socially with their peers and also as, um, as a learner. So, that's going to be really informative as well and very exciting so that again, you can register for that free online event at goodthingsinlife.org. And we are also offering a um, foundations course. You've heard me talk about it before. I'm really excited about this course. It's called Belonging in School: The What, Why, and How of Inclusive Education. I'm working with Marilyn Dolmage on this. And Marilyn and I just spent the weekend at her lovely cottage on the shores of Lake Huron in Ontario, working on refining the content for this course, and it is going to be really powerful. Even if you feel like you already have a foundation in inclusive education, this course is going to be amazing and hugely valuable. You can get information on that course or sign up for the wait list so that you're sent information at goodthingsinlife.org/bis for Belonging in School. Next week on the Good Things in Life Podcast, I will be speaking with the engaging and insightful Shelley Moore. I look forward to seeing you then.