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Philosophy of Special Education

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Special Education Requires Special Teachers

My personal philosophy of special education aligns with the general philosophy, with one particular element included as a necessity to learn. The general philosophy is that all people have the ability to learn, regardless of their disability. However, I feel that the ability of a disabled child to learn means very little if the student is not provided with supportive and specific instruction by dedicated teachers, so that their ability to learn can be realized. The establishment of IDEA and Section 504 have guaranteed educational availability, while assuring that the learning environment is conducive to helping the child learn, rather than restricting progress. With the implementation of Individualized Education Plans (IEP), the special and general education teachers play pivotal roles in helping the student reach educational goals and determining how those goals will be met. Special teachers are necessary in providing special education, and must utilize effective strategies to succeed. They must be flexible in their approach considering the ever changing and unique needs of their students.

I believe that any child, even with those faced with certain barriers created by disabilities, can learn. However, their ability to learn can only result in actual learning if the tools necessary to achieve it are provided to them. Every child learns differently, and a child with a disability demands an individualized education plan to accommodate those needs. Some children benefit most from content that includes self-help skills in conjunction with basic academic skills. Others

may require a completely different approach to learning because of a disability like dyslexia. The needs of a dyslexic student who necessitate a particular learning strategy for reading comprehension, will differ greatly from the child that falls in the autism spectrum and requires techniques that alter deficits in executive functioning. They both have the ability and potential to learn, but without an appropriate and intensive educational approach, neither will achieve the goal of learning particular skills.

The legislature passed through IDEA and Section 504 requires that every child is given the opportunity to receive an education regardless of a disability. Children have often been denied full and fair access to educational opportunities because of race, culture, language, gender, socioeconomic status, or exceptionality (Banks & Banks 2016). Children have always possessed the ability to learn but were not always given access to instruction or an environment that could teach them. Many students in the regular classroom were not identified as having a disability which caused them to suffer from lack of intervention. Through IDEA, the free appropriate public education act (FAPE) ensured that all eligible children were given access to a public education free of charge, regardless of the disability. A fundamental role of IDEA is the push to identify children who have a disability and then provide intervention. Rather than using the “wait-to-fail” method of identification, IDEA encourages schools to use response to intervention (RTI) to identify disabilities and implement early intervention. IDEA also gave parents a voice in their child’s education. Section 504 of IDEA guarantees equal access to educational programs and activities within the school, such as extracurricular activities. It also can generate a 504 plan that is developed to accommodate the student so that their academic success and access to the least restrictive learning environment is made a reality. IDEA and Section 504 impacted disabled children tremendously by identifying disabled children, providing

them the right to receive free public education, and ensuring that the tools and environment needed to learn were made available to them.

Disabled students face a number of obstacles on a daily basis that range from personal, behavioral, physical, social, emotional, and educational challenges. One goal of special education is to understand these challenges and adapt the classroom so that the child's academic success is nurtured not hindered. A teacher must close the gap between the barriers and the achievements of each student. One strategy that would be beneficial to employ is to build meaningful relationships with parents and fellow teachers by effectively communicating, and making yourself available to students, parents, and teachers alike. Intentional lesson planning, based on realistic and consistent expectations that reach every student in the classroom is essential. In an inclusive classroom, for example, a teacher may need to incorporate a variety of techniques to teach the same material because every student learns differently, especially the disabled child. Develop strategies to engage the students so that they are excited about learning despite their insecurities. Show students that mistakes are natural and provide an opportunity to learn. Rather than allowing mistakes to exhibit an inability, encourage mistakes to be part of the learning process and boost their confidence during class participation. If these strategies are applied correctly, the success of the student will be seen in the community and social interactions, as well as the classroom. The barriers present in the life of the disabled student are often broken down by the ability of the teacher to align academic and functional curriculum in the classroom while ensuring the environment in which the student is placed does not restrict their ability to absorb the material.

IDEA requires access to the least restrictive environment (LRE) for every disabled student, which determines where a child should receive their education within the school. After a

disability has been identified, and an IEP is created to establish specific goals, the environment in which these goals will be met becomes an imperative piece of the plan. The LRE represents the educational environment where the disabled child will be most empowered. When determining the LRE for a student, there must be considerations made regarding the various dimensions of school life and the most beneficial integration into those areas. One factor that is imperative in achieving a successful placement for the child is the ability to change the environment as the student's needs change. Flexibility is crucial when determining where the student should receive their education.

Teachers, both in special education and the regular classroom, encompass many different roles; nevertheless, they share many of the same students and their goals often align. The special education teacher is responsible for numerous educational situations, so they must master a variety of roles daily. One of the most important roles for a special education teacher is monitoring the IEP and recommending adjustments and accommodations for the student as needed. Because the student's particular IEP goals set the standard all teachers follow, it is imperative to monitor the progress of each child and determine if the goals are being met. If they are not, then the special education teacher must recommend adjustments to the IEP and accommodations for the classroom. Collaboration between the special education and general classroom teachers is essential to a student's success. Because the special education teacher is trained to understand the needs of the disabled student, the success of the regular teacher and the IEP depend on this particular role of the special education teacher.

Instruction in the regular classroom for a child with a disability must revolve around an inclusive model of instruction. The teacher should implement key planning and teaching strategies to meet the IEP goals, while accommodating the individual needs of the student. The

teacher must select essential material to present to all students and then organize it in a way that every student can learn the information. Accommodations to achieve this may include modified testing, alternative time allowances, or specific seating arrangements. Because the ultimate goal is full inclusion into the regular classroom, the teacher must be flexible in their techniques and monitor the results of the student while in their classroom. Collaboration, communication, and evaluation are key components to instruction in the regular classroom.

Understanding that every child can learn must be followed by the acceptance that they will not be able to learn successfully without intensive and individualized instruction from dedicated teachers. Through IDEA and Section 504 students are guaranteed access to an appropriate free education in the public school system, along with careful placement in an environment in which they can learn. This legislature provides every student access to tools, techniques, and teachers that can help them overcome the many obstacles they face. Effective strategies applied by teachers help secure success for the student in the classroom, as well as in the community and social environments they are exposed to daily. The role of any teacher involved in the life of an exceptional child is of great importance, whether it involves monitoring and adjusting the IEP or providing inclusive instruction. The ability of the teachers to communicate and collaborate will determine the success of the IEP goals, and even more importantly, the success of the student. Hopefully, with continued educational advancements and an increased understanding of the exceptional child, teachers will be equipped to face the ever changing needs of the student, guided by the insight that they all are able to learn if we are willing to effectively teach.

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