

Philosophy of Special Education

Mandi Baker

The basic Philosophy of Special Education is that all children, regardless of their disability, have the right to a free appropriate public education. This tells us that all children deserve to learn, grow and succeed to the best of their abilities. This also tells us that a child's disability is only a small speed bump in the road to achievement. Lastly, this tells us that we should be supportive of this decree and do everything in our power to ensure fair and equal educational opportunity for all children.

Whether a child with disabilities can learn is not a question but how much a child with disabilities can learn is. Whether a child has an intellectual disability, a learning cap due to their IQ level, or a learning disability, a unique way of learning, would need to be determined first but either way, providing the most education possible is a necessity. Every child, with or without a disability, deserves the best and most an education has to offer. There is no limit. There is no fine line. There is no magic number or guestbook. There is only a child willing and able to learn and an education system with endless knowledge to be obtained.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Section 504 are both anti-discriminatory acts that prohibit anyone, anywhere from denying people who have been identified with disabilities the right to an education just like everyone else. These acts give everyone the freedom to learn and grow academically in a least restrictive environment. These acts also require that those with disabilities be taught in a suitable way that meets their individual needs. Children in the past were pushed aside and thought to be less than a "normal" person therefore they were never taught the same. They were basically babysat. These acts coming along in 1973 and 1975 opened the doors for these children who are bright in their own way to be afforded the same

educational opportunities as everyone else. These acts paved the way for these children to learn, grow and utilize all the benefits of the education system.

Depending on the disability, children can face minimal obstacles or children can live a very hard, struggling life. A child can struggle to sound out words or a child can struggle to focus. A child can have a hard time sitting still or a child can be confined to a wheelchair. A child can have no way of communication or a child can randomly lose control of their own little body. The only difference in these children and the children without disabilities is the way they learn. Children with disabilities have every right to an education that non-disabled children have and it's up to us, as teachers and parents, to make sure they get it. Patience is key, determination is required, education is the goal and concerted effort is how we get there. Helping a child in any safe, productive way necessary is what we do. Showing a child love and understanding, rewarding a child for good behavior or a correct answer, taking extra time to review with a child, constructively, clearly and quietly critiquing a child when wrong are some examples of good teaching. Notice I said "good teaching"; I didn't say good teaching of disabled children or good teaching of non-disabled children. That's because every effort that's made to teach the non-disabled children should also be made to teach the disabled children. Teaching is teaching, regardless of the disability.

How well a child handles and manages a least restrictive environment, how well the environment handles and manages the child and where the child functions and learns best are what I feel should be taken into consideration when determining where to place a disabled child and for how long at school. We want a safe, stable environment for all involved, including the child and the teacher as well as all the other

students in the classroom. We want a child to feel welcome and comfortable, but we also want the child to get the attention they need. We want the child to feel involved and included but not lost or forgotten. We want them in a beneficial setting but not secluded. To figure these things out, I think it takes some trial and error. Some test runs and some creative and innovative thinking. At the end of the day, it's about what is best for the child and where the child is most likely to succeed as a whole.

When I think of a special education teacher, I think calm. Caring. Collected. Patient. Strong. Detail-Oriented. Quick. Stern. A special education teacher's role is to roll with the flow of a disabled child, or children. They assist in the education of these children that have special needs or need special attention. They tend to a child's disabilities while helping them learn and grow in an educational environment best suited for them. They care for them like a parent does a child with their best intentions at heart while protecting and advocating for their future.

A general education classroom teacher's role in a disabled child's world is just the same as their role in any child's world. A teacher's role is to provide the best education possible and to provide that education in whatever way the child needs in order for it to be received and retained. A teacher should have a high sense of efficacy and only use the child's disability as a challenge to be a better teacher. A teacher should use tactics and strategies that are beneficial to both disabled and non-disabled children. A teacher should stress inclusion and involve a disabled child just as much as they involve a non-disabled child. To me, the best way for a teacher to teach a disabled child is to help them be so included and focused on the learning that they forget they even have a disability.

Educational excitement and a “you can” attitude! That’s the recipe! Everyone seems so focused on the children’s disabilities. Why are we focused on what they can’t do instead of what they can? I feel like these things should just be common knowledge. Common sense. DO WHAT IS BEST FOR THE BABIES! Period. End of story. Figure out what works best for the child and do that. Figure out where they struggle and find a way around it. Figure out what their limitations are and push them. Find their strength and encourage it. What do I feel like we can do as teachers to best teach those WITH OR WITHOUT disabilities? Take Albert Einstein’s saying “Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid” and mix it with Dr. Seuss’s saying “You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose.” and work with the children instead of against them. Limits are most often self-imposed and it’s our duty, as teachers, to reach and surpass them.