Inclusion and special education essay sample

Education, School

Inclusion is a burgeoning issue in our educational system. It has been said that the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes and fostering an atmosphere of acceptance within the framework of education for all is to increase the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream schools (UNESCO, 1994, as cited in Foreman & Kelly, 2008, p. 109). There are multiple definitions and interpretations of inclusion, but at the heart of them all is the belief that every student with disabilities has the right to be educated in mainstream classrooms alongside their peers without disabilities. In this essay I will outline my personal philosophy regarding inclusion, how it affects my practice as a teacher and finally, the behaviour support issues associated with my professional role.

Fundamentally, education and schooling should be socially just. Students should be able to study and complete their educational outcomes free from the effects of prejudice and discrimination based on sex, language, culture and ethnicity, religion or disability," (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006, as cited in Foreman & Kelly, 2008, p. 111). The idea that education should be equally available to all has eventuated from a number of ideological frameworks. The normalisation principle, for example, explains that " that all people are entitled to live a lifestyle that other people in their community would describe as ' normal'," (Dempsey, 2008, as cited in Foreman & Kelly, 2008, p. 111). Principles such as normalisation have led to changes in legislation and policy which have acted as a catalyst to the development and adoption of inclusive education.

Foreman and Kelly (2008) explain that in Australia, inclusion is educational policy rather than law and has been adopted in some form by all states and

territories (p. 11). The Disability Discrimination Act which makes it " illegal to discriminate against a person in education on the basis of their disability" (Commonwealth, DDA, 1992, as cited in Foreman & Kelly, 2008, p. 112) was reinforced in 2005 with the enactment of the Education Standards. The Education Standards highlight the expectations of educational providers to support students with disabilities in their educational endeavours (Foreman & Kelly, 2008, p. 112). For these reasons it is of vital importance that all pre-service teachers become educated in the area of inclusive education. I personally believe that inclusion is extremely beneficial as it provides a means for teaching children of the same age the same outcomes – regardless of physical, mental or communication barriers.

There are numerous ways in which we as teachers can implement inclusion into our classrooms. Meo (2008) wrote of the utilisation of the universal design for learning (UDL) principle to assist teachers in including all students in their lessons. Meo explains that " UDL is a means of identifying and removing barriers in the curriculum while building scaffolds, supports, and alternatives that meet the learning needs of a wide range of students." (2008, p. 22). UDL requires teachers to provide multiple or flexible representations of information, a variety of options and choices in the expression of students' learning and finally multiple strategies in engaging students with the curriculum (Meo, 2008, p. 22). Meo (2008) elucidates that through the incorporation of " the three principles of UDL into curriculum planning, teachers increase their ability to customize their curricula … to meet the needs of the diverse learners in their classes," (pg. 27).

The successful and effective implementation of inclusion is not only dependent upon the professional practice of individual classroom teachers but also on the collaboration of school staff in the education process. The utilisation of behaviour management techniques has been identified as an essential component for a successful learning environment. Allday (2011) describes a range of behaviour management techniques which aim to reduce misbehaviour and increase positive social and academic behaviour. These techniques include; creating a responsive management system, active supervision, allowing students to respond, reminding students of the rules, use of eye contact, temporary escape and praising appropriate behaviour (Allday, 2011, pps. 293-296). Apart from behaviour management techniques, teachers are encouraged to use the behaviour management support systems within a school to foster the learning environment.

Hines (2008) explains that within a school context teachers should work collaboratively with other teachers and staff to " increase the likelihood of successful inclusive education," (p. 278). Teachers as well as staff administration and community leaders, must be involved in all planning related to inclusive programs (Creasey & Walther-Thomas, 1996, as cited in Hines, 2008, p. 278). Principals should encourage teachers to build collaborative relationships with student learning and support officers, speech pathologists, physio therapists, paediatricians, itinerant support and special education teachers to produce a safe and engaging academic environment for all (Hines, 2008, p. 280).

As a teacher, my main prerogative is to engage my students with the curriculum and push them into challenging themselves and achieving their goals. Irrespective of a student's abilities, or be it, disabilities, I believe all students should be entitled to equal education. Although the adoption of inclusive pedagogies requires some changes in the way we teach the curriculum, possible professional development as well as increased collaboration among teachers, staff and the wider school community, I think it is important for teachers to embrace the idea of inclusion, because it presents us with the opportunity to develop our professional practice and foster a change not only in the ideological underpinnings of education but also in society.

Reference List

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