

# PHILOSOPHY OF INCLUSION

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The Merriam Webster Dictionary describes inclusion as the “action or state of including or of being included within a group or structure”. In reference to education, Kids Together, Inc. paints a more vivid image with their description. “Inclusion is part of a much larger picture than just placement in the regular class within school. It is being included in life and participating using one’s abilities in day-to-day activities as a member of the community. Inclusion is being a part of what everyone else is, being welcomed and embraced as a member who belongs. Inclusion can occur in schools, churches, playgrounds, work and in recreation”. The Bible encourages us treat our neighbors as we would like to be treated. This can be applied specifically to inclusion of all students in classrooms. In Phillipians 2:3-4 it says, “Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourself. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

As a teacher, I will have the opportunity to influence the culture of my classroom. Kids are very impressionable and it is important to think carefully about your words and actions when in a position of authority. I hope to teach my students to be inclusive in the way I treat people, especially in the way that I treat them. In 1 John 3:18 it says, “Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth”. Inclusion needs to become more than what we say or how we act. It must become so much a part of our philosophy that it becomes second nature to us.

However, I realize that not all influence will change certain characteristics of my students. Kids are amazing. They each have unique attributes to bring to the classroom. I

appreciate this aspect of education. Our education system puts 30 students of mixed cultures, abilities, and interests into a classroom and then wonders why they don't all act the same and cooperate. We have bullies and low-test scores because we ask our students to be people that they are not. As a society, we push students towards perfection, to be free of flaws. We need to stop this! Our student's beauty is found in their differences. Kristen Zechello said it best, "Inclusion enhances self-esteem and promotes acceptance, understanding, and friendship. Communities in which all children and youth are included are healthier, more balanced, and beneficial for all members." We should start celebrating the things that make our students unique rather than trying to fit them into a cookie cutter idea we as teachers have dreamed up for them.

Lastly, I believe that the topic of inclusive education is not solely referring to students with learning disabilities—but rather, any student who is different. "The term, 'inclusive education', widely used in recent times, is usually thought to imply education for students with perceptible disabilities (hearing/visual impairment, cerebral palsy, intellectual impairment). This is inaccurate. Inclusive education means a system of education that is progressive and flexible enough to meet the diverse needs of all students, including those with disabilities. Inclusion is an ongoing process of school reform that is beneficial to all students — bright, average, not so bright, and those who have exceptional or special educational needs." Reena Sen shared this at the Institute of Cerebral Palsy and it describes my philosophy of inclusion. As a teacher, I'd like to be an advocate for my students, fighting for their right to learn in a way that makes sense for them. Once we as teachers begin to provide students with individualized instruction, they will finally get the inclusion they have always deserved.