

Philosophy of Special Education

Special Education refers to a curriculum, services, materials and preparation that are tailored to the needs of all learners. A well-rounded program would ensure access to all areas of the child's development; social, emotional, physical, and academic. Special education programs are necessary to ensure that all children have access to quality education, regardless of their abilities and challenges Lillard (2017).

Equity in education ensures access to education by providing equal opportunities to those with disabilities. An inclusive environment addresses barriers to learning, offering personalized instruction that also promotes all areas of development, self-advocacy, and independence. It also addresses ethical responsibilities and compliance with federal and state laws US Department of Education (2004).

Key takeaways from personal experience working in a Montessori community that support the learner are as follows:

- The prepared environment supports differentiated learning styles by offering a variety of materials to support the learner's need for tactile and kinesthetic learning.
- The continued repetition leads to mastery.
- The multi-age environment allows for modeling of the work from each stage.
- Materials and lessons that allow for self-correction.
- Individualized education plans that foster independence and agency in the learner.

Evidence-based practices are also an internal part of the Montessori program as noted below:

I. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL): Integrate SEL into the students daily routine. Provide lessons that develop emotional intelligence and social skills. Use Montessori's emphasis on self-regulation and independence to support learners.

II. Family and Community Engagement: Foster strong partnerships with families and the community. Involve the families in the decision making process of activities within the community. Involve parents in the creation of an IEP.

III. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Use teaching methods that affirm the

cultural identities of your learners. Incorporate cultural references throughout the year curriculum.

IV. Trauma-Informed Education: Recognize and respond to the impact of traumatic stress on learners. Create a safe and support environment.

V. Anti-bias Education: Address and challenge bias and stereotypes within the classroom. Use diverse books, materials and discussions to promote inclusivity.

These practices promote diversity, equity and inclusion in the classroom Carraway (2014).

Inclusive Practices

Inclusive practices ensure all students are welcomed, supported, and can reach their full potential. This approach requires flexibility, collaboration, open-mindedness, and respect for everyone. Slee, R. (2018) emphasizes the importance of inclusive practices that recognize and accommodate the diverse needs of all learners, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities.

Montessori communities, with their emphasis on creating a sense of community and belongingness, represent a model for inclusive practices. Parents are encouraged, if not required, to spend time on the campus contributing to the overall success of the program. They may contribute with gardening/landscaping, creating connections in the community, reading with students, or offer any talents or guidance in areas of their own interest and expertise. The parents are welcome to participate in the many events held throughout the school year.

Key Inclusive Education Strategies that are inherent in the Montessori environment include the following:

I. Differentiated Learning: Create lessons designed specifically to meet the needs of the learner by modifying what you teach, how you teach and with what materials you teach. Montessori materials are adaptability to address different skill levels.

II. Universal Design for Learning: Provide multiple means of representation, engagement and expression. Make sure the Montessori materials are also available for students with disabilities.

III. Culturally Responsive Teaching: When creating a curriculum, or lesson,

integrate and or consider various cultural perspectives. Use materials and present lessons that represent the background of your current students.

IV. Collaboration Learning: Encourage group work and peer learning. This fosters community, mutual respect and enhances engagement within the environment.

V. Create Individualized Learning Plans: Develop personal lessons plans that considers each student's interests, needs and challenges. Regularly assess each student to ensure progress and engagement.

VI. Positive Behavior Support: Implement strategies that support positive behavior and create a supportive learning environment. Put an emphasis on Montessori's grace and courtesy lessons each day.

Inclusivity is expanded to the home life of the learner. This allows parents to feel supported and included in their child's educational path. Parents and guides together explore solutions that convey impartiality and respect. Discussions are positive, with both parties engaged in active listening. The outcome is a family focused plan that addresses the child's, the family, and the school's needs. This ensures congruency between the school and the home.

Diverse Perspectives

Diverse perspectives refer to being open to hearing and integrating the ideas of others. The school community consists of families from various cultures, bringing a variety of experiences and education that fosters a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. This diversity enriches the community. Banks, J. A. (2019) provides an overview of multicultural education, emphasizing the importance of incorporating diverse perspectives into the curriculum to promote understanding and respect for unfamiliar cultures, races, and identities.

From personal experience, being involved in a multicultural community, where diverse cultural practices and perspectives existed, the key was to create an environment and learning experience in which the learners can identify and see themselves in our society. This exposure has significantly influenced both my decision-making process and my perspective on the world. My role has deepened my understanding and heightened my cultural sensitivity in interacting with children and families. It has specifically highlighted how children perceive adult behaviors through the lens of their

own cultural backgrounds. This experience underscores the significance of cultivating meaningful relationships with students that extend beyond daily lessons and responsibilities.

My background and training in Montessori education has heightened my sensitivity to the individual needs and strengths of each student. Identifying and assessing individual differences is an important step in recognizing each learner. Weekly, personalized lesson plans are tailored to every child's current developmental stage in Math and Language. These subjects particularly require customized planning due to the varying levels of mastery and repetition needed within each grade and with each learner.

Additionally, accommodations for learners' specific talents and needs across all subjects are considered, while core topics are uniformly presented to the entire class, the activities related to these subjects are differentiated based on each student's abilities. For instance, when teaching the water cycle, offer multiple options for demonstrating mastery of the material. This practice supports the three qualities of Universal Design for Learning (UDL): multiple means of representation, engagement and expression Gargiulo & Metclaf (2015).

Educational Change

Educational change refers to the process updating policies, practices, and curriculum to meet the demands of our changing economy and society. The changes in technology and advancements in research have taught us new ways to approach learning and how to meet the needs of developing young learners. Fullan, M. (2016) discusses the complexities of educational change in today's rapidly evolving world. He emphasizes the need for systemic change that goes beyond superficial reforms, addresses the underlying structures, and practices that perpetuate inequities in education. Furthering knowledge on brain development, and the importance of nutrition and movement has encouraged me to rethink current methods and implement innovative approaches to support the engagement of learners in a distraction driven culture Gazzaley & Rosen (2016).

Educational change in Montessori classrooms can be done by recognizing that not all young children learn to read the same way. Some learners need a more systematic, explicit, multi-sensory instruction that requires more repetition and adult led supervision. Adding assistive technologies to support all subject areas, based on the students' learning profile is another progress change to consider. In addition, learning profiles on all students before creating lessons and setting up an environment to

ensure accessibility and accommodations for students with exceptionalities would guarantee support for all learners Gargiulo & Metcalf (2015).

Understanding learner profiles, incorporating evidence based strategies, and creating a least restrictive environment provide the differentiation, the interventions and the support necessary to produce a learning environment that is suited for all learners.

References

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