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### The principles of inclusive education.

Inclusive education provides education for exceptional children together with other 'normal' children in a regular classroom. "Exceptional" means children that are not like common children educated in usual classrooms. You need to implement special methods and technology to teach these children. The term comprises both mentally retarded, physically handicapped and gifted, talented children.

Inclusive education encompasses a continuum of educational services for children with exceptional conditions. The regular classroom now admits the vast majority of exceptional children to its roles. The regular classroom teacher helps provide the prescribed special education services according to an individualized education program. This instructional program is developed with input from a transdisciplinary team of specialists in the child's area of exceptionality, with input from the regular classroom teacher, input from the family, and input from the child. It defines the nature of the child's problem and long and short –term goals. Inclusion in the regular classroom does not mean that the regular classroom teacher provides all of the prescribed instructions alone. The continuum of services provides consultation to the teacher for the least disabled students and supplementary instruction and services for more disabled students. The supplemental instruction may be done by an itinerant specialist or a school-based specialist, in the regular classroom, in a resource-room or in a special class. Some children with disabilities are enrolled in a regular classroom (inclusive education) in order to have daily contact with nonexceptional children in extracurricular activities. They may, however, have the largest percentage of their educational curriculum provided in a special class with a special education teacher.

The term 'inclusion' has been defined in many ways by many people. Generally inclusion is an educational philosophy based on the belief that all students are entitled to fully participate in their school community. Inclusion is most often used to describe programs for students with disabilities, but it also pertains to students from different

cultures whose first language is not English, students at risk for failure because of alcohol or drug abuse, and other students with special needs. In the case of children with disabilities, the aim is to integrate them, with the support they need, into classrooms with nondisabled peers. When inclusion works, these children become members of their classroom communities, valued for their abilities and for who they are.

The principles of inclusive education are as follows:

1. **Teaching All Students.** Students learn in different ways. It is, therefore, important to develop the skills to teach in different ways. For example, some students learn best when introduced to information visually, while others learn best through hearing information, working in groups or activity-based projects. By using several different approaches to the same material within the same lesson or activity, information can become more interesting and tangible to a greater number of students.
2. **Exploring Multiple Identities.** Building confidence and affirming identity for students supports their learning. Students who are excited about themselves and other people, and who are inquisitive about the world around them will more easily learn to be compassionate and understanding of people who are different from them. They are less likely to hold negative feelings about others, if they are comfortable with themselves and also with those who are different. Help students to see that none of us is a “final product!” Rather, we are all in a constant state of developing as learners and as members of our communities.
  - Discuss all areas in which a student may find opportunities for success — academic, artistic, athletic, physical, emotional and personal.
  - Help students understand the ways in which their identities and their experiences may be linked to their gender and sexual identity, their ethnicity and racial identity, or their religious beliefs and religious identity.
  - Maintain a respectful environment among the students. Help them to use respectful language and behaviors with all their classmates and peers. Work with students so that they learn to disagree respectfully. Students should not shy away from conflicting ideas but learn how to use divergent points of view as an opportunity to deepen their understanding of themselves and others. Cultivate a classroom community where questions are welcomed and expected.

3. Preventing Prejudice. All of us are influenced by the legacy of institutionalized inequalities that permeate history as well as the stereotyped ideas and images we encounter every day. The best way for an educator to address preconceived stereotypes and to prevent them from escalating into feelings of prejudice and bias is to create awareness. This can be done by discussing students' stereotypes in both large and small groups. This topic may bring up some challenges and sensitivities from the class and the teacher, as well. Here are some ways to discuss the topic of prejudice. It is important to talk about all topics the students bring up. These are a number of suggestions about how to create student awareness of stereotyped beliefs and inequality:

- Teach explicitly about histories of unfairness, or institutionalized inequality. Guide students in understanding that institutionalized inequality is not everybody's fault, but that it is everybody's responsibility to become aware, and to create fair and equitable learning communities.
- Talk about all of the student's feelings and attitudes. Do not ignore prejudicial behaviors or feelings. They will not go away on their own. Cultivate a productive atmosphere of trust, examination and responsibility rather than one of guilt.
- Set clear boundaries and rules about behaviors that are based on prejudices, such as teasing, bullying or excluding. Set goals for an anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-biased classroom or learning community. Work explicitly with students to create ways to recognize and interrupt discriminatory or biased language and acts. Be clear with students that you and they will benefit from an inclusive learning community.
- Introduce key words to students that can alert them to the presence of a stereotype. "All women..."

4. Promoting Social Justice. Young people are good judges of what is or is not fair. Talk to students about issues of fairness, and of justice or injustice in terms of equality for all.

5. Choosing Appropriate Materials. It is important to choose books and materials that reflect accurate images of diverse peoples. Books, magazines, movies, web-based media and handouts can be guides for behavior and ideas, but they also have the potential to perpetuate some stereotypes. Read over all materials you are planning to use with students and decide if they promote a positive and appropriate image of people and

themes. The following are a number of things to keep in mind when choosing what you present to the students:

- Be diverse. Have multiple pictures, sources, or readings by and about different groups and people.
- Let groups speak for themselves. Use sources from within the contexts you are studying.

6. Teaching and Learning about Cultures and Religions. It is important that students learn about other cultures and religions in a positive and comfortable manner. This includes learning about the cultural and religious differences among their peers – as well as other cultures and religions that are more remote from their experiences. Some ways to do this are:

- Teach students the value of asking questions. As a teacher, model ways of asking respectful questions in the classroom or learning community. Encourage them to think about how to ask respectful questions of each other and to practice doing so.
- Discuss appropriate ways to ask questions about identity, religion, culture and race. Help the students use positive terms to gain information about others.
- Provide anonymous ways for students to ask questions such as an anonymous “question box” in a prominent place in the classroom. This is essential for a learning community that hopes to open dialogue. When students realize they may ask previously silenced questions, they can become more eager participants in their learning.
- Emphasize that culture is not a fixed or permanent condition. Society and culture are constantly changing. Languages, religions, rituals, traditions and ways of knowing change over time. People often appear very different now from how they may have appeared in the past. It is important for students to recognize the evolving nature of, and the inaccuracies of, previously assumed images.
- Allow opportunities for students to learn about the ever changing cultures of the world.

7. Adapting and Integrating Lessons Appropriately It is important that educators be flexible in the adaptation of all the lessons in our curriculum as well as prescribed curriculum in general. Sometimes, the most teachable moments are unplanned and unscripted. Often pre-designed lessons are a good starting point for dialogues or critical thinking. Some ways to do this include:

- Be mindful of who is in your classroom, so that the lessons can be more culturally-relevant. When utilizing a lesson that shows representations of a particular place (such as the country of

Kenya in East Africa), first ask students if they have ever been to the place in question. The students who have been there, or have family from there, may be able to participate in the activity in a leadership role. Also, be cognizant that stereotypes or ignorance on the part of students or educators can make some students hesitant to share their connection or personal stories. Students and families may feel more trusting to share stories in a classroom that makes distinctions among the range of perspectives and experiences held by individual Kenyan families and that avoids the all-too-common pitfall of assuming that all experiences from Kenya, or worse, from the continent of Africa, are similar. It is also presumptuous to assume that the student from the place in question is an expert or wants a leadership role. Caution should be taken to be certain that the student is comfortable sharing.