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| Anchor Assignment |
| Option C |

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**Section I – Inclusion**

 Presently, inclusion is a controversial issue worldwide. Initially, inclusion was intended for students with only mild disabilities and was referred to as normalization. According to authors Gollnick and Chinn, normalization was expanded and advocated in the United States by W. Wolfensberger in 1972 (2009). He suggested a rethinking of the term normalization, introducing the concept of “social role valorization” or giving value to individuals with mental retardation (Gollnick & Chinn, 2009). These ideas about ‘mainstreaming’ gave way to the term inclusion.

 Gollnick and Chinn explain inclusion in the words of Tiegerman-Farber and Radziewicz (1998) in their text; it read in its “purest” form, inclusion means that students with disabilities have a right to be integrated into general education classes regardless of their ability to meet “traditional” academic standards (2009). Inclusion now applies to children with moderate to severe disabilities as well, providing them with similar opportunities as the children with mild disabilities (Gollnick & Chinn, 2009).

 In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, commonly known as PL 94-142 was passed by the 94th Congress and was the 142nd Public Law to pass (DeGenova, 1997). In 1990, this law was amended and became the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) or IDEA 2004. IDEA 2004 does not require inclusion. What federal special education law does require is the least restrictive environment or LRE (DeGenova, 1997). LRE is stated by Gollnick and Chinn to mean that children with disabilities are to be educated with non-disabled children whenever possible (2009). I think almost all educators can agree on inclusion as a positive concept, but issues about whether full inclusion is appropriate for every child regardless of the type/severity of disability are present and, as previously mentioned, controversial.

 The main problem with inclusion is that special education is inadequately funded. I think almost all children with disabilities could be served in a general education classroom if proper resources and supports were available. Disparagers would argue that some children behave dangerously or are too disruptive to be provided for in a general education classroom. If schools were ordered by courts to find resources, this would help the case for inclusion. Congress should be required to meet its financial obligations in fully funding IDEA so that school districts will have adequate means to support and practice full inclusion (DeGenova, 1997).

It is my view that segregating children with disabilities from general education classes without justification is equal to segregation by race and/or ethnicity; both are morally and ethically wrong. I plan to always practice inclusion to the fullest extent in my classroom. I will advocate for families with children with disabilities, involve myself in school-sponsored fundraising events and work to educate misanthropists. There is no good reason why children of all abilities, races and cultures cannot be taught as a single group. This theme of inclusion is evident in the rise of the number of people teaching, supporting and practicing non-biased, multi-cultural education. Humans are more alike than we are different and we are all connected, whether we choose to acknowledge it or not.

 Research proves there has been a progressive trend toward greater inclusion in our nation’s schools (Gollnick & Chinn, 2009). Turnbull and his associates were cited in *Multi-Cultural Education in a Pluralistic Society* (8th edition). In this text, they indicated that prior to the 1984-1985 school year, only about a quarter of the students with disabilities were included in general education most of the day (Gollnick & Chinn, 2009). By the 1998-1999 school year, it was up to half of the students with disabilities who were included in general education courses most of the day (Gollnick & Chinn, 2009). Although this is very uplifting news for the field of teaching, I know all too well that the debate over inclusion is not soon going to end.

**Section II – Diversity within the Context of Special Education**

 Professionals’ views of the roles of parents have evolved drastically. Some used to blame parents for childrens’ disabilities or delays. Now, research has shown how crucial it is to partner with the parents and families of all students (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2009). The family can provide insights into the behavior and disposition of their child as a student and be an affirming influence in the education process.

 It has always been imperative in the field of teaching to establish an open line of communication between teachers and parents. The teacher should bring both positive and negative feedback to the parents. Culturally diverse families are often uncomfortable at formal meetings at school for this purpose (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2009). In special education especially, there is often a mismatch between the ethnicities of teachers and students. This mismatch could cause wariness in the family and the perception of Caucasian teachers as standoffish to or disinterested in cultures other than their own.

 Another problem is that teachers and school professionals often attempt to communicate with families via printed materials, newsletters or emails. This form of communication may not get through to a family who is learning English as a second language. A way that families could be made more comfortable is to be allowed to receive information in different ways and settings. The authors of *Exceptional Learners: An Introduction to Special Education* give ideas to help support diverse families (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2009). These include having parent meetings at a neutral site, possibly providing transportation and/or childcare, involving siblings and extended family and being sensitive to the family’s desire, if it exists, to not get deeply involved with intervention because of the stress it could cause the entire family.

 Since the 1960s and the Civil Rights Movement, educators have become increasingly aware of the extent to which differences among cultural and ethnic groups affect children’s experiences with schooling (Gardiner & Kosmitski, 2008). Cultural diversity presents particular challenges for special education teachers in the following three areas: (1) assessment of abilities and disabilities, (2) instruction and (3) socialization. Students may be particularly likely to be identified or not identified as having certain disabilities depending on their gender or and ethnicity. Adolescents of color, boys and children living in poverty are more likely to be identified as having behavior disorder. The disproportional representation of males and ethnic minority students in special education has been ongoing (Gardiner & Kosmitski, 2008).

 The disproportional placement of ethnic minority students into special education suggests two things: in some cases, students are misidentified and placed wrongly (stigmatized and segregated), and in other cases, the disabilities of ethnic minority students are ignored and the students do not gain access to an appropriate education (Gardiner & Kosmitski, 2008). This data has consequences not only for teachers, but for lawmakers, parents, researchers and other professionals, advocates, students and community representatives. Here are some ways that I will respond as a teacher:

* supporting the availability of strong academic programs which foster success for all students
* implementing and understanding special education policies and procedures from early intervention to placement and re-evaluation
* working to increase the level of home, school and community involvement in education
* acquiring and utilizing diverse resources and technology to enhance the education of all students
* being flexible in types of communication, times and places of parent meetings and teaching strategies used
* consistently emulating an attitude of acceptance and planning curriculum according to the children’s emerging interests and learning needs.

**Section III- Action Plan and Field Experience Report**

 My plan of action was far from a firm one and took a long while of hard thinking to generate a relevant list of contacts for interviews. I was quite nervous that the tiny town of Susanville, California would not even have five agencies serving people with special needs for me to interview.

 First, I used the local phonebook to put together a list of agencies with contact information. Then, I attempted to make appointments with supervisors at the agencies I had found. I made tons of phone calls. Having endeavored to absorb so much knowledge in such a short amount of time, I forced myself to put aside my disdain for talking on the phone. Altogether, I would say this process took four to five days.

 Once I had finished booking appointments with five agencies who provided services to people with disabilities, I kept my appointments. The professionals I met with were more than happy to connect me with other programs. Every place I visited, whether it was the corporate office, a countywide program or a privately-run organization, had friendly and informative staff. They seemed to share a team mentality based on helping intellectually, physically or emotionally disabled individuals to reach their fullest potential.

 A couple of more common themes became evident when I reviewed my interview notes and reflected on my observations. I was able to see that educators are beginning to make a shift from highly valuing individual merit to cultivating interdependence. One cannot know an individual without knowing something about their family and to teach effectively, this is needed. This theme has been evident in all of the school and childcare settings I have worked in. Part of my personal philosophy as a teacher is to always try to include whole families in the education of my students. Their parents, after all, are their first teachers and should be treated as educators’ closest partners.

 Another common theme I picked up on was how knowledgeable and qualified the people I spoke to appeared. When asked the question, “How do individuals become involved with you program?” I was given a long list of requirements. The professionals whom I talked with were genuinely interested in their students and seemed very passionate about their careers.

 I have felt at times that the placement of work-study interns or volunteers in childcare and special education was done without first checking on their education and experience. It put me at ease to know that not just anyone off the street could come in and begin interacting with students of all abilities without having had some training or orientation of some kind.

 While my time in studying and working with people who have special needs is not extensive at this time, I take pride in knowing that I have been impacted for the better through the experiences that I have had. I was excited to find that courses on exceptional learners were included in a child development degree. I think that future educators can only benefit from this coursework and that it will allow us to live up to the professional standards already in place in the field of child development.

 It takes a creative, unique and special person to be a fantastic teacher. It is one of the most important jobs in the world. I have found that my beliefs and values have been enhanced in a very short time. I feel that I will never stop learning, even after earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in Child Development.

**Section IV – Conclusion**

 My understanding of diversity has changed over the course of this semester. I was not aware that so many different types of exceptional learners subsisted presently in our country and in the world. All that I have learned has opened my eyes to children who may have different needs than I had at their age, such as learning English as a second language or living with a learning disability.
 I think that it is necessary for general education teachers to have some knowledge of special education so that inclusion can be made an even more common happening in our schools. This should extend to early education teachers as well since referrals and interventions can be hugely beneficial if caught early in a child’s development.

 Service learning, volunteering and interviewing professionals that are a part of this field all relate to the concepts of diversity and inclusion. Since these experiences are comprised of hands-on learning, students most likely will retain more. Being able to directly observe how professionals interact with children with special needs is great practice for students who are training to be teachers. Seeing strategies and theories related to inclusion being applied provides hope where textbook readings can sometimes make the issue sound grim.

 My beliefs about service learning, diversity and inclusion are going to shape my behavior as a student and teacher. The more diverse and special students in a group, the more I would have to adapt for them to be able to learn best. I am going to try to recognize handling families of my students with care and respect and will continue to practice acceptance, fairness and equality in all of my dealings with people.

References

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