

ART FOR HEART: ART FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS WITH PHYSICAL OR MENTAL CHALLENGES

by:
MARGIOLEH G. ALONZO
Bataan High School for the Arts

In the Philippines, it is reported that enrollment of students with disabilities stood at 93,895 for School Year 2021 to 2022, such is lower by 74%, compared to its pre-pandemic figure of 360, 879. It is easy to notice that in this country, there is a lack of public fund to support students with special needs. Among the basic rights which they have is the right to quality education, yet it is often overlooked because of unequal opportunities when it comes to education and learning. As such, learners with special needs are left in the dark due to the absence of arts in special education curriculum.

Teaching the arts is both a noble process and special journey. Inclusivity is one of its most important aspects as it aims to humanize arts through a holistic approach. Arts also plays a vital role in helping learners with disabilities gain skills to complement their uniqueness. Art, crafts, music, and dance can provide students with learning disabilities a learning room for them to express themselves through various media forms and gain confidence in the process. Such is the reason why former president Rodrigo R. Duterte signed Republic Act 11650 or the “Instituting a Policy of Inclusion and Services for Learners with Disabilities in Support of Inclusive Education Act.” The legislation seeks to ensure that learners with disabilities are guaranteed the right of access to basic education services and access to formal school system. The creation of Inclusive Learning Resource Centers in every city and municipality of the country is also mandated under the law.

However, despite these legal actions, it is still imperative to analyze the importance of arts in the education of students with special needs.

First, art can unlock confidence among students with learning disabilities. Children with learning disabilities often have a perception that they are incapable of certain activities in school. Art can overcome this by showing that a simple paintbrush, a drum, a costume, scissors, and glue can be tools for self-expression. When students can express themselves freely without fear of failure, confidence emerges and grows among them.

Second, learning through arts can open the world to students with learning disabilities. Students have opportunities to create their own understanding of the world through the complex thinking and problem solving that arts require. For example, studies showed that beats can help children learn rhymes and other features of reading such as phonological awareness. Dance, on the other hand, provides students with special needs a social way to learn about following directions, rhythm, and sequencing.

Third, traditional forms of assessment sometimes scare students with special needs. Such traditional means of academic assessment can be difficult for individuals with learning disabilities. Creative projects can be a solution for that as these offer learners the freedom to display what they know without the constraints of printed text.

Despite the passage of the Republic Act 11650, our lawmakers and leaders should lend more time and attention to students with learning disabilities and their needs. Every student deserves quality education, and that can be achieved through implementing holistic art approaches and learning opportunities.

The beauty of the world is bestowed upon its people and regardless of disabilities, everyone is created equal. Students, with or without learning disabilities, should know that art knows no blindness or disorder. It never discriminates upon its master and lands on those who persevere.

References:

Bailey, S. D. (1993). *Wings To Fly: Bringing Theatre Arts to Students with Special Needs*. Woodbine House, 5615 Fishers Lane, Rockville, MD 20852.

Bain, C., & Hasio, C. (2011). Authentic learning experience prepares preservice students to teach art to children with special needs. *Art Education*, 64(2), 33-39.

Dorff, J. B. (2012). The importance of collaboration in art classrooms for success of students with special needs. *The intersection of arts education and special education: Exemplary programs and approaches*, 10.

Al-Yahyai, F., Al-Zoubi, S., Bakkar, B., Al-Hadabi, B., Al-Gaseem, M., & Al-Qaryouti, I. (2021). Effects of a Special Art Education Course on Attitudes toward Omani Learners with Special Needs. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 10(1), 191-200.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2022/03/16/2167714/philippines-guarantees-learners-disabilities-free-basic-education>