

DIFFERENT BUT EQUAL: BUILDING INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS FOR ALL

by:

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Education belongs to everyone – it’s as basic as the air we breathe, not some prize reserved for a few. In the Philippines, the drive for inclusive education shows a clear promise: every student, whether navigating a wheelchair ramp or learning in a rural classroom, deserves the chance to learn in ways that truly matter. Inclusion means more than just putting students from different backgrounds in the same room; it’s about creating a space where unique voices are valued, where a quiet smile or bold idea is welcomed, and where every learner has the tools to thrive.

Inclusive education sees every learner’s distinct strengths and hurdles – like the quick grasp of a new word or the struggle to follow a noisy classroom – valued and understood. Children with disabilities and those from marginalized communities bring voices that make a classroom richer – like a story told in many colors – sparking empathy, teamwork, and genuine respect. UNESCO (2017) points out that inclusive education helps every student, not just those with special needs, by fostering a spirit of acceptance and teamwork – like classmates pulling chairs together so everyone can join the circle. In the Philippines, the Department of Education has built inclusive practices into its system, guided by policies like DepEd Order No. 72, s., which teachers now reference in lesson plans and classroom routines.

In 2009, the program gained momentum, making it easier to put inclusive education in place for children with special needs – like adding ramps to school entrances and extra support in classrooms. Teachers make inclusion real, from adjusting lesson plans to noticing when a quiet student gets left out. Educators can meet students where

they are by tailoring lessons to individual needs, using assistive tools like text-to-speech, and weaving in teaching that reflects each learner's culture. Research shows that inclusive classrooms boost learning and strengthen social-emotional skills, as students come to appreciate differences and show empathy – like listening closely when a classmate shares a different point of view (Loreman, 2017). Still, obstacles persist – tight budgets, untrained teachers, and the quiet sting of stigma can all chip away at the success of inclusive programs.

Even with these hurdles, inclusive education stands as a sign of hope and real progress – like the first light breaking through a cloudy morning. When teachers, parents, and communities work together, schools can build strong support networks – like a steady hand guiding each child – so no student slips through the cracks. Booth and Ainscow (2011) remind us that inclusion isn't a final stop – it's an ongoing effort to chip away at the walls that block learning and keep people from taking part.

When it welcomes every kind of learner, the Philippine classroom mirrors the just, compassionate society we dream of – like a small room buzzing with many voices, yet moving toward the same goal. Real education isn't about how smoothly we teach the top students; it's about how far we stretch to lift up the ones struggling at the back of the room.

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