

## FROM SEGREGATION TO INCLUSION: PHILOSOPHICAL SHIFTS IN PHILIPPINE SPECIAL EDUCATION

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Education has consistently been acknowledged as a significant instrument for social change, especially noticeable in the realm of special education in the Philippines. Throughout the years, the philosophical stance on educating students with disabilities has significantly changed, shifting from separation and marginalization to inclusion, fairness, and empowerment. These changes signify wider transformations in societal values, human rights, and educational theory, illustrating how philosophy can influence practice.

Historically, the evolution of special education in the Philippines was shaped by colonial and international educational frameworks, which frequently encouraged a segregationist perspective. Children with disabilities were housed in distinct institutions or classes, where they were regarded more as subjects of care than as engaged members of society. Disability was often seen as a constraint or shortcoming, resulting in restricted access to education. The establishment of early institutions for children with sensory disabilities, like schools for the deaf and blind launched in the early 1900s, signified the start of structured special education. Nonetheless, these institutions mainly functioned as detached environments, mirroring the dominant societal view that students with disabilities needed segregation instead of inclusion.

By the mid-20th century, a transition started to occur, focusing on educational assistance instead of simple segregation. The Department of Education in the Philippines began establishing Special Education (SPED) Centers in public schools in the early 2000s, offering trained educators, modified curricula, and referral systems that connect

education with health and social services. This time highlighted an increasing awareness that students with disabilities possess unique needs that need to be addressed to support their educational and social growth.

In recent decades, inclusive education has led to the most significant philosophical transformation. Inclusion highlights that every learner, irrespective of their abilities, should engage meaningfully in regular classrooms. It is based on principles of human rights, equality, and social justice, claiming that every student has equal value and merits fair access to education. Inclusion extends beyond merely being in a classroom; it entails genuine involvement, interaction, and personalized assistance. In the Philippines, this strategy signifies a transition from seeing special education as an anomaly to acknowledging it as an essential part of inclusive education for all, where diversity is embraced as a strength instead of being seen as an obstacle.

This shift in philosophy has been reflected in changes to laws and policies. Legislation has been established to safeguard the rights of students with disabilities and encourage inclusive education. According to Republic Act No. 7277, persons with disabilities should not be discriminated against in education. The Department of Education has launched programs focused on teacher training, educational technology, and cooperative initiatives to guarantee that students with disabilities access quality education alongside their classmates. These policies demonstrate a dedication to fairness and social accountability, yet difficulties persist regarding resources, teacher readiness, and public perceptions of disability.

Currently, special education in the Philippines highlights comprehensive development, acknowledging that students evolve socially, emotionally, and intellectually. Equity takes precedence over rigid equality, recognizing that diverse learners need customized assistance to achieve their potential. Involvement of family and community is viewed as crucial, highlighting the notion that education is a collective duty. Even with persistent obstacles, the transition from segregation to inclusion in

education marks a significant achievement in the country's educational framework, reflecting a more profound appreciation for the rights, dignity, and capabilities of every learner.

In summary, the development of special education philosophy in the Philippines, transitioning from initial segregated models based on deficit perception to modern inclusive strategies, highlights a wider societal acknowledgment that education is a right, not a luxury. Currently, inclusive education embodies a dedication to human dignity, fairness, and empowerment, guaranteeing that every student, regardless of ability, has the chance to flourish and make significant contributions to society.

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