

**UNIVERSITY OF MALTA  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION**

**Written Test for Diploma in Facilitating Inclusive Education Mature Applicants**

Date : 7th August 2015

Reading Time: 2.00 p.m. – 2.05 p.m.

Duration of Exam 2.05 p.m. - 3.35p.m.

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*Answer all questions.*

Read both excerpts below and answer critically the questions making clear references to the given texts

- (a) How do YOU understand inclusion?
- (b) What, are the conditions needed to ensure that all children benefit from being included?
- (c) What are the pro- and anti inclusion arguments? Where do you stand in this debate stating the reason why?
- (d) The recent audit carried out for the Ministry of Education by the Commission for Special Education and Inclusion made reference to a deficit model (or medical model).
  - I. Explain what you understand by this.
  - II. List a number of potentially negative consequences of this model.
  - III. Explain what could be a good alternative to this model? Why?

**EXCERPT 1: What's Inclusion? Theory and Practice**

(Taken from Special Education Guide <http://www.specialeducationguide.com/pre-k-12/inclusion/whats-inclusion-theory-and-practice/>)

**Understanding Inclusion**

Before you can enter the debate on inclusion, you must first understand what inclusion is. Effectively grasping this concept entails two tasks: defining inclusion and understanding the theory behind the concept. The Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC) defines inclusion as "a term which expresses commitment to educate each child, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the school and classroom he or she would otherwise attend."

Supporters of inclusion maintain that it is a civil rights issue—recognizing the rights that people with disabilities deserve. These rights include equal access and equal opportunity. The first attempt to secure equal access and equal opportunity inside

schools originated with a law passed in 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. This legislation was revised in 1990, 1997 and 2004, and was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). On the other side of the inclusion theory is the fact that nowhere within IDEA is the term "inclusion" mentioned.

The law asks that each child be educated in the least restrictive environment; the very least restrictive environment is the general education classroom.

One significant difference between the original 1975 regulation and current-day IDEA involves the level of requirements placed upon schools. Generally speaking, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act resulted in segregated classrooms, although that was not a mandate of the law, rather entry into a relatively unknown field of education. However, as other civil rights movements have shown, separate does not mean equal. IDEA has had reauthorizations with each moving the language to placing more emphasis upon the general education classroom and general education curriculum. While often confused—even by educators—there still remains no specific reference to inclusion or location of services to disabled children, other than "least restrictive environment."

### **Putting Inclusion into Practice**

IDEA doesn't necessarily mandate inclusion. Given the vast discrepancies within the realm of special needs, the "least restrictive environment" is determined on a case-by-case basis. Practicality plays a big role in deciding whether an inclusive environment best suits a child. Parents, you alone do not get to make this decision. At the same time, neither does your school's administration. Everyone on a child's IEP team collaborates to reach a verdict.

Two major sections of the IEP help to determine if inclusion is right for the child or not. The first is the legal definition of special education: "specially designed instruction." Whether the child is placed in a general education classroom or pulled out for some other form of service, he or she MUST receive specially designed instruction in his or her area(s) of weakness. Some inclusion advocates tend to consider only adaptations and modifications, however, if only those are provided, then the child is not receiving special education.

The adaptations needed by a student prove quite vital when considering his or her classroom placement. These come in two forms: accommodations and modifications. Essentially, they assist students with special needs by compensating for any disability-related obstacles, giving students the tools to excel. After all, a pupil with special needs is unlikely to thrive if he or she is simply dumped into a general education classroom. (For an in-depth look at adaptations and the differences between accommodations and modifications read Adaptations, Accommodations, and Modifications).

### **The Anti-Inclusion Argument**

As previously mentioned, debate exists over inclusion. Common anti-inclusion arguments involve concern over how inclusion will change the learning environment for other students, as well concerns centering on the expenses of inclusion. For instance, in "*Inclusion in the Classroom*" the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities lists "fear that general education classrooms will be disrupted if students with disabilities are included" as a barrier to inclusion.

WEAC offers an example of an anti-inclusion argument centering on financial motives as it describes the view of James Kauffman of the University of Virginia: inclusion is "a policy driven by an unrealistic expectation that money will be saved." The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center provides another example of a financially-based concern, naming lack of funding as a reason that schools might not support the adaptations needed for inclusion.

There is considerable research evidence that inclusionary practices are at least as effective as those provided by a pull-out delivery method. While this is true, most of the research is new and more needs to be completed to fully understand what might be best for children with special needs.

### The Pro-Inclusion Argument

Meanwhile, those who support inclusion point to the benefits which result from incorporating students with disabilities into general education classrooms. Educators and all students (essentially, everybody) benefits through interacting with different people. Including students with disabilities into the classroom may also force teachers to leave their comfort zones and learn new techniques to become better instructors.

Proponents of inclusion cite enhanced social interaction as a big benefit for students of all levels of ability. Friendships, otherwise unimaginable, form, and these bonds allow kids to understand diversity in ways that textbooks and formal classroom lectures can't. **While not a traditional subject such as maths and science, diversity proves important in creating an open-minded society.** Throughout their lives, students will encounter others who do not think or act as they do; by learning how to work and interact with these individuals, they gain an advantage not only in the classroom, but also in life in general.

Inclusion can also trigger enhanced collaboration between educators. For example, if a child has a learning disability that makes it difficult to read, his or math teacher may need to confer with other teachers to find a way to help that student with word problems.

Perhaps the most important benefit of inclusion rests in the academic benefits for students with special needs. These students become engaged in their education as opposed to staying unchallenged inside segregated classrooms. In other words, inclusion gives students with disabilities the best chances to thrive academically.

There is also a newly developed body of evidence derived from co-teaching, where the special education teacher joins with the general education teacher for areas of student weakness. The team approach is proving to be possibly one of the best methods of including special education students, while providing both accommodations and modifications and specially designed instruction.

**EXCERPT 2: EDUCATION FOR ALL: Special Needs and Inclusive Education in Malta**

(External Audit Report 2014, page 59)

An examination of the background information, supported by evidence from the focus groups and interviews, indicates that the approach and thinking underpinning the needs identification and assessment processes is still dominated by a deficit (essentially medical) model. The statementing process emphasises the diagnosis of difficulties and then the provision of individual support that often takes a rehabilitation approach. The system is geared towards a 'certifying' function and relies heavily on 'expert assessments' – mainly clinical tests by psychologists. This has a number of potentially negative consequences:

- ✓ Individual learners are given a label that may mean that their rights to resources are met, but which may stay with them for their school career and beyond.
- ✓ There is a risk that classroom teachers and school staff become de-skilled as the information that they contribute on learners' learning is not the main focus of formal assessment. The emphasis on 'difficulties' and remediation, rather than flexible pedagogical approaches and other forms of learning support, reinforces the need for expert input.
- ✓ IEPs based on formal assessments may not be fit for purpose in terms of informing teaching and learning. IEPs may be seen by school stakeholders as a 'paper exercise' rather than a working tool that supports their activities.
- ✓ The SMP and the state psychological service are under increasing and unsustainable pressure to conduct sufficient high quality assessments within a reasonable timeframe.

Overall Audit data suggests that the current needs assessment procedures are not adequate in terms of identifying the complex learning needs of all learners and then proposing ways forward that enable school staff to meet those needs. The procedures are geared towards a compensatory approach, rather than increasing the capacity of mainstream schools.