

## Sample – Doctoral Writing Assignment

Student Name

Student ID Number

Course: EDU618 - ANALYSIS OF CURRENT ISSUES IN EDUCATION

Unit # 4

### 1. Evaluate the arguments for and against full inclusion of all students in the regular classroom.

There is a growing debate around the use of inclusion and mainstreaming. Full inclusion means that special needs students are educated with support in the same environment as their peers; mainstreaming, on the other hand, is the process where struggling or high achieving students are in the same class, but the assessments or curriculum are slightly altered based on the needs of special students (Hattie, 2009). There are valid arguments both for, and against inclusion and mainstreaming. In one way, inclusion is helpful because it has shown to produce positive results in student achievement while also keeping students together with their peers (Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2010). On the other hand, the belief exists that students, especially gifted and special needs students, need differentiated instruction to accommodate them (Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2010). Differentiated learning comes in the form of accelerated learning or pulls out programs where students receive the attention they need. This author has experienced inclusion, mainstreaming, and mixed ability grouping. During these experiences, he saw full inclusion has both positive and negative aspects. This essay will discuss the positive and negative aspects of inclusion, as well as discuss possible alternatives.

Full inclusion has shown to be effective in terms of student achievement as well as a statement of universality embodied in American education (Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2010). Mainstreaming, which is a form of inclusion, has also shown effective. According to Hattie (2009), one meta-analysis asserts that mainstreaming is useful for mathematics and reading. Compared to separate classes for special needs students, mainstreaming shows to have benefits in these subjects and students remain in their original class. Hattie (2009) explains full inclusion is also beneficial to students because it allows them to participate with classmates generally without ostracizing them for the issues they have. In other words, inclusion supports social development when included in classroom activities with peers. In this author's experience, full inclusion gives the students, of all abilities, to interact with their peers. Socially and developmentally, such interactions are positive for students regardless of their ability. In Korea, for instance, students are grouped together regardless of ability. They have the opportunity to learn from their peers or even support them if needed. However, there are some issues this author saw which require attention. First and foremost, the teacher guiding the class has to ensure that the students who are struggling are monitored to ensure they are not left behind. This author witnessed in one class that the homeroom teacher was not very attentive to the class as a whole to encourage interaction and support. The culture of the class reflected it. Some of the struggling students were far behind the others in terms of social development and in

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some cases, the children were bullied continuously or picked on for their individual differences. In other words, students with disabilities, poor performance, or high performance, were often ostracized for the way they were. In order for full inclusion to work, teachers must ensure that such behavior is stomped out early on while finding avenues to ensure all students can integrate and learn from each other effectively. If that is achieved, full inclusion can work as witnessed by the author.

Arguments against inclusion are highlighted by the belief that students learn differently and require differentiated support in instances with special needs and gifted students. For example, students learn differently, and those who struggle require special attention to accommodate their needs (Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2010). This comes in the form of using special needs programs or accelerated programs. Accelerated programs for gifted learners, according to Hattie (2009), have a high, positive impact on learning and student achievement. Accelerated programs are basically an opportunity for students to move quickly through the curriculum at their own pace based on their ability (Hattie, 2009). These programs can come in the form of a pullout program or mixed age level groupings. Through experience, this author has seen that these programs are most effective. This author has also seen ability grouping to work for students and teachers. For example, this author previously structured math and English courses to run concurrently. In other words, three classes would have English during the same period, and they would break apart from their homeroom and attend English A, B, or C depending on their level. The curricula and assessment remained identical, but students of similar ability were grouped together. This technique was successful because the teacher had to spend less time differentiating the material to accommodate different needs. Unlike inclusion and mainstreaming, arguments for accelerated programs and ability-grouped students can also be useful in schools.

The argument for and against full inclusion provides valid support for both sides. Nevertheless, research has given conflicting support. For example, mainstreaming has shown to be effective in math and reading, but accelerated programs also show benefits (Hattie, 2009). Through this author's personal experience, both full inclusion and separated instruction have their benefits. Full inclusion gives all students a chance to learn in the same environment, and social development at the same rate as one another (Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2010). Using mainstreaming methods have also worked for this author. Ability grouped classes also have made progress with this author and give teachers the opportunity to work together with students of similar ability. This allowed them to make excellent use of their time and resources. Therefore, those for inclusion and those against inclusion have a variety of research and opinion-based reasons that support their position. The most important point to remember, however, is students should be monitored, and their progress tracked to ensure they receive the best education available. Depending on the resources available to the district or school, the education may vary.

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**2. Since school is compulsory and students must attend, examine how a teacher's responsibilities should be balanced with his/her rights (academic freedom).**

The responsibilities of a teacher are to educate students so that they can enter the world ready to handle any issue that comes their way. Unfortunately, a teacher's responsibilities to the student and their choice to use specific material in the classroom are not always balanced. For example, a teacher is expected to teach to achieve specific objectives. However, the route they take to reach the goal may take unexpected turns. Some of these turns expose children to topics or material that is unsupported by parents, the school board, or other interest groups (Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2010). On some occasions, teachers can lose their job or be sanctioned by the school for using material that is not in line with school benefactors. Teachers argue that their influence can lead to censorship of material, thus impeding teacher and student academic freedom (Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2010). Students must be exposed to a wide variety of material, including controversial material because it paints the whole picture of how life really exists outside of the classroom. Within that perspective, teachers should also be responsible when selecting material that is suitable for the students. This means that controversial material can be shared with students, but it is the teacher's responsibility to know the appropriate time to do so. Therefore, teachers must balance their responsibilities with their desire for academic freedom in the best interest of the student. This essay will examine this relationship and explain that academic freedom can exist if teachers use the age-appropriate material for student understanding.

In order for teachers to exercise their academic freedom, they must ensure that the material they choose for teaching is appropriate for the students they are teaching. In other words, teachers should be responsible when choosing topics (Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2010). This does not mean censoring themselves, but rather, consider the student audience and determine if the topic is out of the scope of their understanding. For example, the author believes that discussing date rape and human trafficking are fundamental topics that students should encounter. Fourth-grade students, however, are not the appropriate audience for such a topic and discussion (Ormrod, 2012). Not only is the topic beyond comprehension for younger students, but they may also be frightened. This author also believes that talking about sex is necessary but addressing the topic in 11 grade is too late. The point is, then, that districts must not be afraid to discuss important and often controversial topics like those above, but instead find the best grade level. Although the age-appropriate material has recently been debunked by Deans for Impact, they explain that material is suitable once a student has learned the prerequisite material. For instance, if a student learns about sex in 6th grade, they can learn about trafficking after. Therefore, it is a teacher's responsibility to balance academic freedom with common sense choices about when material should be taught. They have a duty to parents and society because they serve as guides to children and their role in life after education.

Bias and indoctrination are issues that teachers should consider when balancing academic freedom and responsibility. This author has witnessed teachers inadvertently exposing their own personal political views when teaching a lesson. As students are impressionable at a

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young age, this is a huge issue (Ormrod, 2012). It is the teacher's job to teach free from bias in regard to religion and politics. Teachers must take responsibility for this area because it is a significant issue. Public school, for example, exercises a separation of church and state so teachers should not push their views on the students (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2013). This author recalls a scenario in his high school where he wrote an essay on Creationism and Evolution. The teacher made it very clear she did not support my essay choice because Christianity was right, and evolution was wrong. Teachers should not make this mistake, but instead, encourage lines of inquiry with the student to either validate or repudiate topics. It is a teacher's responsibility to guide students to their own answers, not determine automatically for them (Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2010). Therefore, it is a teacher's responsibility to be sure that they do not go down the path of indoctrination or bias but stay on the path of truth using materials they feel are best suited to accomplish this task.

Teachers have a great responsibility. They have the responsibility to explore new ideas in a quest for knowledge and ensure, much like doctors, that they have their students' best interests at heart. Censoring may inhibit the quest for information and dampen inquiry (Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2010). Teachers must also guide classroom activities in a way that encourages questioning and dialectic discussion (Hattie, 2009). In other words, they should approach education with an open mind but be mindful of the materials and information shared with the students. This does not mean that they should censor material but just be cautious of the timing. Therefore, striking a balance between academic freedom and responsibility is a difficult but necessary task for teachers. Without a balance, teachers risk providing students with education either too limited or too abstract for comprehension.

### **3. Analyze the concept of indoctrination and make a case for or against indoctrination in the classroom. Is indoctrination ever justified?**

Modern education is evolving to give teachers more freedom to teach what they feel is best for the students. A teacher's responsibilities, however, are to ensure that students also receive an education that is free from bias and gives them an opportunity to ask questions and find the truth for themselves. Unfortunately, there has been a growing trend of indoctrination in education seen from elementary schools until university (Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2010). Indoctrination, according to Nelson, Palonsky, and McCarthy (2010), is when teachers take academic freedom too far resulting in the unchecked imposition of one point of view. This approach is not acceptable because it undercuts the roots of education and does not give children a chance to approach learning without bias. Despite this author's view that indoctrination is harmful, there are instances where indoctrination is justified. Countries like Indonesia are highly centralized and built around Islamic culture and customs. Therefore, it is normal for teachers to infuse Muslim views into the classroom. It would be an ethnocentric viewpoint unrealistic in various worldwide contexts if education did not follow the local customs. Therefore, this essay will analyze indoctrination as harmful to education but is justified

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in specific contexts of or relating to religion in countries where the customs are dictated by such traditions.

Indoctrination, in a general sense, is harmful to education because it does not allow students to make unadulterated decisions. Therefore, it should be avoided if possible. Indoctrination is often seen in liberal university campuses around the United States (Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2010). This author attended Kent State University which leans left in terms of student population and staff. In political science courses, the classes were of a liberal majority, and the classroom discussions were rarely argumentative because only one side of the issue was given. In addition to the student views, the professor did not remain impartial and maintain a bipartisan approach. Instead, he guided the discussion in such a way that only allowed for an analysis of one side. Since this author was an adult, he can rationalize both sides of an argument and determine his viewpoint on his own. Therefore, it is unpleasant, but it is not extremely harmful to adults compared to younger students. According to Nelson, Palonsky, and McCarthy (2010), this issue is even more “pernicious in the K-12 education than it is on the university campus” (p. 412). If indoctrination takes place in elementary schools, then it can be detrimental for students in their developmental years who are prone to influence. For example, elementary students are usually able to apply logical operations to particular events but struggle with abstractions and hypotheticals (Ormrod, 2012). In such situations, students would be very impressionable and what teachers say would carry much weight on their memory. If the ultimate goal of education is to help students learn through inquiry, then indoctrination at younger ages could have profoundly adverse effects. As a result, in most circumstances, teachers should avoid indoctrination by providing multiple viewpoints and remaining unbiased and impartial during lessons and discussion.

Although indoctrination is not beneficial for student learning, it is hard to avoid it in specific instances where religion is highly influential in the learning environment. This author has taught in Indonesia where Islam is the majority religion. As such, society is highly influenced by Islamic foundations that are replicated in public educational practices. For example, students are permitted to leave for the call to prayer, and teachers often use the Koran to teach moral and ethical classes. Religious private schools in the United States also operate in such a manner (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2013). Naturally, parents are free to send their children to schools of their choosing which are in line with their beliefs. Therefore, Catholic families have the option to send their children to religious schools that teach values and principles supported by that religion (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2013). This author has also worked in a private Buddhist school. All classes had philosophical Buddhist teachings and teachers were instructed to place some aspect of the religion into the lesson plan. Sending children to these schools is a right of the family. However, it can also be handled well by ensuring that a code of ethics exist for teachers to ensure that it does not cross a line into full-on indoctrination. According to Nelson, Palonsky, and McCarthy (2010), schools should have a professional code of ethics which focus on developing the student’s education and the skills required to learn, instead of “turning them into activists” and teachers avoid “teaching for social justice” (p. 412). Establishing a code could then strike a balance between indoctrination and adhering to personal values.

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Indoctrination is taking place in the United States. It is not suitable for younger students because it encourages them to make opinions based on imposed viewpoints, not their own reasoning (Ormrod, 2012). In most scenarios, it should be avoided, and schools must use an ethical code outlining appropriate teaching methods. Despite the apparent issues with indoctrination, it is an ethnocentric point of view to believe that indoctrination can be avoided entirely. Countries around the world have governments and education systems infused with religious ideology that govern all aspects of society. Moreover, parents have the freedom to send their children to schools which are in line with family morals and principles. This is seen in private schools around the United States (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2013). Despite exercising the academic freedom to teach how they see fit, schools should be careful to ensure that education is not force fed. Instead, teachers should guide learning so that students can begin to reason on their own from a young age.

#### **4. Review the development of the teaching profession and the emergence of teachers' unions.**

The teaching profession has dramatically evolved since ancient times. Once a well-respected position in the days of Plato and Socrates, teaching has undergone a different transformation through the American colonial period (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2013). During this time, teachers were highly religious in nature and scripture was an essential material for teaching (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2013). As time progressed, however, the position became less respected and appreciated. Salaries of teachers were low, and working conditions were poor while accountability and structure were non-existent (Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2010). In order to combat these issues, accountability and professional development requirements entered the line of work, and teachers' unions emerged to improve teacher conditions, and by extension, student achievement (Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2010). In order to understand how far the profession has come, this essay will review this development from the days of Plato, through the American colonial period, and to the modern day. Ultimately, the reader will see how the profession has changed in both nature and structure while understanding that teachers' unions have the potential to be both helpful and distracting.

Initially, teaching developed from a long history dating back to ancient times. Without any particular license or professional training, these educators still garnered much respect. For example, Socrates and Plato both opened their respective institutions to teach the importance of debate, dialectics, and discussion (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2013). As time progressed, education became mostly religious in nature and teachers were expected to have some background in theology and other basic subjects like English and math (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2013). In addition to religion, America saw the profession change in other ways too. For example, the colonial era exhibited one-room schoolhouses usually reserved for those who could afford education (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2013). These institutions came in the form of tutorial schools, old field schools, academies, and dame schools (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2013). Higher education in colonial time also experienced great influence from religion and only those

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who could afford it would generally attend (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2013). During this time, such influences began to deteriorate. For example, the public school became available to all, and the separation of church and state left religion out of the classroom (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2013). The span of time from ancient Rome and colonial America witnessed a significant evolution of what it meant to be a teacher. These changes continue through the modern era.

The modern era arrived with considerable alterations in the teaching profession often characterized by increased accountability and teacher training (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2013). Now, teachers experience thorough preparation in university and undergo professional development and licensure. Furthermore, structure began to take hold in schools. Three key players supported this development with their ideas: Francis Parker, William T Harris, and Johann Herbart (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2013). Through their contributions, structured education and organization in American education began to take place. For example, Parker, Harris, and Herbart took actions to promote a more methodical approach to teaching and learning with core curricula, uniform teaching methods, and standardization of schools (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2013). The emergence of education reports also impacted the teaching profession. The Nation at Risk report has pushed to hold teachers accountable while education associations pursued standardization for schools resulting in consistent curriculum pathways, improved teacher training, and suggested school facilities (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2013). As a result, the modern era saw sweeping changes compared to the colonial period.

Despite the changes that took place, teachers endured a lack of respect and poor working conditions. According to Nelson, Palonsky, and McCarthy (2010), teachers often experience long working hours and financial constraints, so unions have proven useful to improve overall teacher working conditions such as salaries, working hours, and a decrease in unreasonable conditions. Those in support of unions, like former philosopher John Dewey, argue that these protect teachers to do their jobs well while subsequently improving student achievement (Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2010). This is possible because the teacher's voice becomes louder within unions. For example, they act as a way to allow teachers to publicly put their needs forward and make a more substantial impact on education. There are, however, some negative aspects of teacher unions. For example, some unions have so much power that they actively pursue changing educational policy (Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2010). This means that their actions can impact how schools are run. In other words, these unions have great influence which can overreach into decisions that should be made by administrators, not teachers. According to Nelson, Palonsky, and McCarthy (2010), essential schools' decisions should be made by administrators because adhering to the many different desires of teachers can hinder the vision and mission of the school. Monitoring this issue to ensure unions do not interfere with policy is necessary to ensure that unions are not more troublesome than they are helpful.

Teachers' unions have emerged out of the need of the teachers. Historically, ancient Rome and Greece greatly respected teachers, but as time progressed the profession has lost much of the prestige once bestowed upon teachers. The colonial era saw a shift in the not only

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the style of teaching, but the methods and topics taught to students (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2013). Teachers had a religious background, and the topics they learned were similar in nature (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2013). Since education has evolved in the modern era, there has not only been a change in who is taught but the role of the teacher and their treatment. Teachers grew to experience long working hours and low pay while experiencing a structured approach to education brought about by education associations (Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2010). Teachers experienced growth in responsibility and accountability for what they taught. While the evolution has not always been considered fortuitous for the profession, historically one can see that the profession will continue to evolve. Teachers can only hope that it is for their benefit.

### References

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