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Stories from Nejapa

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Stories from Nejapa

Abstract

"A word picture of what inclusion looks like at the Nicaragua Christian Academy – Nejapa."

Posting about one teacher's work with inclusive education in Nicaragua from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/stories-from-nejapa/>

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Stories from Nejapa

 [all in allthings.org/stories-from-nejapa/](https://allthings.org/stories-from-nejapa/)

Kathleen Van Tol

I go to the [Nicaragua Christian Academy – Nejapa](#) (NCA-N) school every week to help support them as they seek to be an inclusive school community. You can read more about the work that is happening at this school in my [previous article for iAt](#). For this article, I want to give you a word picture of what inclusion looks like at this school. To do that, I am going to share three stories from my visit today.

The first story is about Karla. Karla is a kindergarten student at NCA-N. As I was walking across the campus this morning, Karla's mom stopped me. She had heard from the parents of other children and from the teachers at the school that I might be able to help her daughter. We talked and she shared that Karla was struggling to learn and also seemed to be delayed in the development of her motor skills. She asked if I could arrange for an evaluation for her daughter.

After speaking with her mom, I spent some time in the classroom observing Karla, talking with her teacher, and looking at some of her class work. One of her classmates is Ana Maria, a student from [Tesoros de Dios](#). Ana Maria has Down syndrome and has been receiving early intervention services for some years at Tesoros de Dios. As a result, she is about on level with her peers and is thriving in this setting. In the same way, the staff at Tesoros de Dios will also be able to help Karla. However, the beauty of this story is that not one person suggested that Karla should not be included in this classroom. The only concern was to see if there was more that could be done to help this little girl reach her potential. Karla and Ana Maria are valued members of this classroom community.

The second story is about Pedro. Pedro is a fifth grade boy who has autism. He is academically far below grade level and his teachers need to modify his work for him in all his classes. When I first peeked into his classroom, I couldn't find Pedro. Then his teacher showed me that he was working quietly in the back of the room with two of his classmates. She shared that when she came into the class today, she had a modified activity planned for Pedro. However, before she could begin that with him, two students came up to her and requested to work with Pedro. They said that they knew all about Pedro and how best to work with him.

When I walked over to Pedro's group, it was evident that these two students were correct. As a group, they were all focused on the learning task and didn't need assistance from me. Pedro did quickly greet me. He was polite, but clearly anxious to get back to the work he was doing for the class activity. The other two students didn't even look up. As I was leaving the class, the teacher asked me if she could send me her plans for the next academic unit for feedback on the modifications she has planned for Pedro. We quickly set up a meeting for Monday during her free period to talk more about how to best ensure that Pedro continues to be fully included in her class.

The third story is about Maria. Maria is a lovely fourth-grade girl who has Spina Bifida and uses a wheelchair. I quietly slipped into Maria's classroom and whispered a greeting in her ear. She looked up, happy to see me and had to greet me with the customary hug and kiss. This caused the teacher to notice that I was in the room and so then the rest of the class had to stand up and orally acknowledge me as well. While I dislike disrupting class by having the students greet me, there is something beautiful about having a room full of children stand up and welcome you and ask God to bless you. After looking at the work that Maria was completing with her partner and touching base with her teacher, I moved on to another classroom.

At recess, though, I saw Maria again. She came up to me, two friends in tow. One of her friends is American and Maria wanted her to come and speak to me in English. I chatted with this young girl for a few minutes in English, much to Maria's delight, and then I asked her if Maria was her friend. She replied that she was and I told her that Maria was also my friend. Maria turned to her friend and asked her what I had just said. Her friend whispered it in her ear and Maria's eyes lit up and she agreed that we are friends. I am happy that Maria considers me to be one of her friends, but I am even happier that she has many friends throughout the school community who value her for the delightful person she is and who value their friendship with her.

These are just three stories of the many that I could tell of the beautiful things that can happen in an inclusive school community. I chose these three simply because they all happened today, but I am blessed to get to witness stories like these every day. The staff at Tesoros de Dios wants every child here in Nicaragua to have a successful inclusion story. We are working with teachers and schools throughout the country to overcome the barriers that stand in the way of that goal. The first barrier is often simply to raise awareness that children with disabilities can be successfully included. However, there are also many teachers who have the desire to include these children, but who lack the knowledge and resources to do so. We are working to meet that need and to provide these teachers with tools that they can use in their classroom settings. Typical classroom practices may vary from country to country, but the goal of inclusion is the same: for every child to feel a sense of belonging, value, and respect within their school community.