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3-30-2015

## Education for All

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### Recommended Citation

VanTol, K. (2015). Education for All. Retrieved from [https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty\\_work/167](https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty_work/167)

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## Education for All

### Abstract

"In Nicaragua, teachers do not have the option of sending their students to the special education classroom to work on a particular skill or activity. Just as there are no educational assistants, there are no special education classrooms and no special education teachers."

Posting about one teacher's goal to bring inclusive education available to all schools 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/education-for-all/>

### Keywords

In All Things, Nicaragua, inclusion, special education, Tesoros de Dios, Nicaragua Christian Academy, Nejapa

### Disciplines

Christianity | Education | Special Education and Teaching

### Comments

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

# Education for All

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 [all in allthings.org/education-for-all/](https://allinallthings.org/education-for-all/)

Kathleen Van Tol

Five years ago, I made my first trip to Nicaragua to work with schools that were seeking to better support their students with special needs. That was also the year that David started attending school at the Nejapa campus of [Nicaragua Christian Academy](#) (NCA-N). At that point in time, David was in the 3rd grade. I remember meeting him and seeing his contagious smile, the pride with which he wore his school uniform, and the effort he put into his schoolwork. I have returned to Nicaragua at least once every year since then and when I am on the NCA-N campus, I always look for David. Each time he sees me, he greets me with a big smile.

David is now in 8th grade at NCA-N. He still has a beautiful smile, still is clearly delighted to attend this school, and still works very hard at his academics. David has also made many friends over his past five years at this school. I see them talking together as they share a snack at recess, laughing together during free time, and working together on a group project during class. This semester, I get to the NCA-N campus at least once week and I still always look for David. These days, David greets me with a handshake, as well as that beautiful smile, each time I see him.

This month, the students in the 8th grade welding class at NCA-N made a gift for David. He has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair to get around the school. Recently, though, he had an operation that would allow him to use a walker and he has been working hard in physical therapy at [Tesoros de Dios](#) to learn to walk. His classmates made a walker for him from tube steel and painted it blue, David's favorite color. The students were just as excited to give him this gift as he was to get it.

David was the first student from Tesoros de Dios to be included in the general education program at NCA-N. Since that time, the partnership between Tesoros de Dios, a school for children with special needs, and NCA-N has grown. In the years since that beginning, NCA-N has reached out to include additional children who are part of the program at Tesoros de Dios and children with significant special needs are now included throughout all the grades at this school.

I recently met with NCA-N teachers on a Friday afternoon, after classes were finished for the day, to help with planning for the modifications they would need to make in their classes the following week to meet the special learning needs of their students. At the end of a long workweek, instead of heading home to start their weekend, these teachers were willing to meet together to see how they could improve the ways they are teaching these students. Their commitment to continuing to be an inclusive school community is inspiring.

There are so many resources that are available to teachers in North America that are not available to these teachers. For example, most schools in the United States employ educational assistants to help teachers meet the needs of students with significant disabilities. For almost every one of the students from Tesoros de Dios that is included at NCA-N, if that same student were included in a school in the United States, the student would be provided with an educational aide. However, this is not a commonly available resource here. For some of the Tesoros children who are included at NCA-N, a parent is able to stay at school with them all day to assist. For others, however, even this is not a possibility as that parent needs to work while their child is in school. This is particularly the case for those who are single parents.

Teachers also do not have the option of sending the child to the special education classroom to work on a

particular skill or activity. Just as there are no educational assistants, there are no special education classrooms and no special education teachers. The general education teacher needs to make all the adaptations to the curriculum and provide all the extra teaching and reinforcement that the child needs. A child might be in the fifth grade, but only functioning academically at the first grade level in reading and math. Thus, that fifth grade teacher would need to provide that student with modified materials and expectations for many of the academic tasks throughout the school day while still meeting the needs of all the other students in the class. While teachers in private schools may have classes of only 30 students, teachers in public schools frequently have class sizes in excess of 50 students, which makes this task even more challenging.

In addition, some of the items we would consider essential are difficult to obtain here. Many of the children at Tesoros de Dios are not able to walk, but very few of them have their own wheelchair. Tesoros de Dios has a collection of wheelchairs which the children can use when they are at school, but the wheelchairs have to stay at school as they are shared by multiple children. David uses a Tesoros wheelchair at school. His physical education teacher has asked me to get him a better wheelchair to use during physical education class, but a better one just isn't available. The physical education teacher plans ways for David to participate in the activities of physical education class alongside his classmates, but unfortunately, his wheelchair is too unstable for him to be able to actually do many of those things.

I am working with teachers, schools, and the Ministry of Education here in Nicaragua this semester to help bring inclusive education to more schools. NCA-N serves as a model school for what can be accomplished through a lot of hard work and persistence on the part of parents, teachers, administrators and students. It has been a privilege to be a part of this work and I am excited to have been given this opportunity.