Implementation of Inclusive Education Based on Nature School: an Observational Study and Philosophical Analysis at School of Universe, Bogor

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Abstract	This study aims to analyze the implementation of inclusive education based on a nature school model at the School of Universe (SOU), located in Parung, Bogor. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research was conducted through field observations, in-depth interviews with teachers and school staff, and documentation analysis. The informants included inclusive classroom teachers, co-teachers, and school administrators. Data were analyzed thematically to explore how inclusive values are integrated into the curriculum, instructional practices, and school culture. Findings indicate that SOU has applied inclusive education since its establishment by adapting its curriculum through duplication and modification strategies to accommodate diverse student needs. Co-teachers with specialized training actively assist in both academic and extracurricular activities, while assessments are carried out periodically using customized evaluation tools. The main challenges identified include limitations in learning infrastructure and the availability of professional support staff. This research contributes theoretically by demonstrating how philosophical values of natural and inclusive learning can be merged in practice. Practically, it offers insights for alternative schools aiming to develop inclusive education models that are responsive, flexible, and student-centered.
Keywords	Inclusive Education, Arts, School of Universe

INTRODUCTION

One of the determinants of the nation's future lies in education that is organized properly and equitably. Indonesia, as a developing country, shows concern for the educational sector, as evidenced by the presence of various educational institutions. The Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (UUD NKRI) mandates that the national education system must ensure every citizen has access to quality and equitable education. This mandate includes the rights of children with special needs to receive a decent and appropriate education (Purnama, 2017).

The Indonesian government implements this mandate through inclusive education, which is defined as a system that allows students with and without special needs to learn together without discrimination (Scott, 2020). This system is rooted in the belief that diversity in the classroom enriches the learning experience for all students. Inclusive education aligns with international frameworks such as the Salamanca Statement and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which call for the removal of barriers to learning. It promotes a democratic and participatory model of schooling where no child is left behind due to physical, cognitive, or emotional differences. Thus, inclusive education is not merely an administrative policy but a philosophical commitment to justice, equality, and respect for human dignity.

Desi Pristiwanti (2022) emphasizes that education is a lifelong process that occurs across all settings and situations and contributes positively to personal growth. This perspective challenges narrow definitions of schooling and recognizes learning in formal, non-formal, and informal contexts. As long as a person is alive, they have the right to access education, regardless of age, ability, or background. In inclusive schools, the student admission process reflects this ethos by prioritizing equity over exclusion. According to Al-Nur (2023), this model enables all children—regardless of physical, intellectual, or emotional differences—to have equal opportunities to thrive and develop their potential.

Inclusive education is a breakthrough for educational equity, where all students—both typical and those with special needs (ABK)—can study in the same classrooms. It represents a shift from a deficit-based model to a strengths-based paradigm that values the contribution of each learner. This approach dismantles the structural and cultural barriers that have historically excluded ABK from mainstream education. It promotes educational justice, especially for ABK, who are often marginalized in regular educational systems (Phytanza et al., 2023; Olivia, 2017). By fostering empathy, collaboration, and mutual respect, inclusive education not only benefits ABK but also

enriches the social-emotional development of all students.

However, the implementation of inclusive education still faces various challenges, especially when applied in alternative education settings such as nature-based schools. One such example is the School of Universe (SOU) in Parung, Bogor, which operates as a nature school yet also accommodates children with special needs. The uniqueness of SOU's educational philosophy, learning environment, and curriculum raises a key question: How is inclusive education practically implemented in a school model that differs significantly from conventional formal schools? This problem becomes the main focus of this study, as there is still limited research examining inclusive practices in informal or alternative school settings in Indonesia.

In this observational study, the author aims to describe the implementation of inclusive education held at the School of Universe, Parung, Bogor Regency. The results of this observation or research are interesting because the form of the school is a natural school that has a slight difference from formal schools in general. The implementation of inclusive education begins with the process of admitting new students, implementing the curriculum in learning and evaluating learning. The implementation of inclusive education is a series of processes packaged in the School of Universe (SOU) nature school, Parung, Bogor.

Several stages of the implementation of inclusive education at SOU start from the admission of new students. Since its establishment in 2024, SOU has accepted students with special needs (ABK) with a school orientation, namely building a school for all, even the *stakeholder* The founder of the school is committed to accepting ABK before there is an inclusive education policy. In line with the implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia, it is described through National Government Regulation Number 70 of 2009 concerning inclusive education where every child with special needs has the right to get the opportunity to get education in regular schools (Purbasari et al., 2022). The implementation of inclusive schools is an effort to free the shackles of education and avoid educational discrimination where ABK students are entitled to the same education as normal students at school. Of course, in its implementation, cooperation from various parties is needed, both from the government, schools and the community (Wijaya et al., 2023).

Curriculum is a guideline used in the implementation of education in schools, guidelines or references used by teachers during the implementation of learning. The position of the curriculum in learning is a central position to realize the purpose of Education itself (Lestari et al., 2022). Basically, in inclusive education, the curriculum is developed flexibly following the needs of

inclusion students. The inclusion curriculum model is: 1. Duplication: The same curriculum as regular students; 2. Modification: Curriculum that is tailored to the needs of inclusive students' 3. Substitution: Eliminate part of the curriculum and replace it with an equivalent part; 4. Omission: Removing the regular curriculum because it is not allowed to be used by ABK. The Inclusion Curriculum at SOU uses a Duplication model by combining modifications, where the duplication model is applied to ABK students with a low level of inclusion while the modification model is used on ABK children with high inclusion.

In addition to the curriculum, facilities and services for children with disabilities are things that must be considered considering that not all schools can provide them. According to Daulay, through Fransiska et al, the facility is a facility that can be used by teachers, students and school residents to access or provide learning information at the same time and place (Ndek et al., 2023). The facilities available in schools are a tool to facilitate the learning process, both in the form of physical facilities and the availability of funds in its procurement. Learning facilities will support the smooth learning process in the form of equipment, materials and furniture that are directly used by educators in the education process, including classroom buildings and learning media(Ekonomi et al., 2025). For ABK children, learning support facilities also vary greatly based on the level and type of inclusion. Educational facilities for children with autism are one of the buildings that must be considered for design, especially in the interior, because these spaces will be very actively used. Educational facilities can function very effectively if the space with its users can interact through a visual sense approach, namely by creating a space in the building that is supported by an arrangement of elements that can provide an experience to its users, especially autistic children. The elements in question are in the form of colors and shapes (Aflah & Anisa, 2020)

In addition to the curriculum and facilities in schools, the role of parents as the closest people to children with disabilities is also central to the success of inclusive education. In general, the role of parents in inclusive education can be divided into three areas: (1) parents as decision makers, (2) parents as teachers, and (3) parents as advocates(Official, 2023). At SOU the role of parents given to students is very large, the school invites parents to be involved in decision-making and the presence of parents at home as teachers who are ready to accompany students in their learning. The objective of this research is to describe the implementation of inclusive education at the School of Universe (SOU) Bogor at the elementary school level.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the implementation of inclusive education at the *School of Universe* (SOU), a nature-based school located in Parung, Bogor. A qualitative approach is considered the most appropriate for exploring complex social dynamics and for reconstructing participants' experiences within their natural contexts (Creswell, 2016; Moleong, 2019). In this context, inclusive education is not viewed merely as an administrative policy, but as a social practice that embodies values, philosophy, and human relationships within the educational environment.

The research site was selected purposively due to SOU's unique characteristics, combining nature-based learning with a strong commitment to inclusive principles. The study was conducted over a three-month period, from March to May 2025. During this time, the researcher was immersed in the school environment, conducting observations in accordance with the naturalistic setting principle of qualitative research (Patton, 2002).

Data were collected through three primary techniques: non-participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observations were used to capture the real-life dynamics of learning, student interactions, and inclusive practices within daily school routines (Angrosino, 2007). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five key informants: the principal, two classroom teachers, one special needs assistant (shadow teacher), and one parent of a student with special needs. This technique enabled the researcher to gather rich and detailed information based on firsthand experiences (Sugiyono, 2017). Additionally, school documents such as the curriculum framework, Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), assessment records, and policies on student admissions were analyzed to support the field data.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes three concurrent phases: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The researcher applied open coding techniques to identify key themes related to curriculum adaptation, facilities, the roles of teachers and parents, and the philosophical alignment with inclusive education principles. Thematic analysis was conducted iteratively and reflectively to ensure thick description and contextual accuracy.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the data, triangulation was applied across both methods and sources (Denzin, 1978). Observational data, interview transcripts, and documents were cross-checked to validate findings. Furthermore, *member checking* was conducted by presenting

summarized findings to the informants for confirmation, enhancing the validity of interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through this approach, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive and reflective picture of how inclusive education is implemented within a nature school setting, contributing to the discourse on alternative educational models that emphasize justice, equality, and human dignity.

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FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This study revealed that inclusive education at the School of Universe (SOU) is not simply a compliance mechanism with national policy but a core institutional identity embedded in its philosophy, pedagogy, and daily operations. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and analysis of school documents. The findings demonstrate that inclusive practices are implemented across several dimensions: admission policy, student identification, instructional strategy, therapeutic support, school culture, and family engagement. SOU's model prioritizes dignity, participation, and individual growth rather than merely placement. These practices position SOU as a progressive inclusive institution rooted in both naturalist philosophy and inclusive education theory.

Inclusive Philosophy and Enrollment Policy

SOU adopts a proactive and philosophical approach to inclusion, viewing diversity as an inherent strength rather than a challenge. Since its founding in 2004—well before government mandates on inclusive education—the school has upheld a "school for all" philosophy. Children with special needs (ABK) are welcomed as equal members of the learning community, and their presence is normalized within the institution. The school avoids exclusionary practices and accepts all students unless their physical needs cannot be supported by the school's natural terrain. This approach exemplifies the values of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which promotes inclusive planning from the beginning rather than retroactive accommodation (CAST, 2018).

The admission process includes a unique observation-based screening involving three divisions: academic readiness, psychological well-being, and classroom adaptability. Rather than relying on formal diagnoses, the school utilizes qualitative assessments to determine the most appropriate support for each child. Children undergo a trial period to assess the dynamics between the student, the learning environment, and potential support systems. A maximum quota of three

ABK students per class is maintained to ensure adequate support and individualized attention. This policy reflects a balance between inclusive ideals and operational sustainability, reinforcing the notion that meaningful inclusion requires structural readiness.

Student Identification and Needs Assessment

SOU has established an internal Learning Support Center that functions as the nucleus of its inclusive support system. Unlike many other schools that rely on external evaluations, SOU's center offers in-house identification, therapy planning, and continuous progress monitoring. The identification process includes direct behavioral observation, developmental milestone checklists, and collaborative teacher feedback. These assessments inform the creation of Individualized Learning Plans (ILPs), which outline academic, therapeutic, and social goals for each ABK student. By emphasizing developmental readiness over clinical labeling, SOU shifts the focus from disability to potential (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

ILPs are living documents, reviewed and revised at least once per semester to adapt to the evolving needs of the student. Teachers and therapists collaborate to align classroom strategies with therapeutic goals, ensuring consistency in instruction and intervention. The holistic nature of this process fosters deeper understanding of each child, allowing for personalized instruction that honors student dignity. This framework minimizes fragmentation often seen when diagnosis and intervention are managed by different entities. It also ensures that inclusion is not only educational but developmental and therapeutic in nature.

Learning Process and Curriculum Adjustment

Observations revealed that SOU implements two primary curriculum strategies: duplication and modification. Students with mild special needs may follow the same curriculum and assessments as their peers, representing the duplication strategy. In contrast, students with more complex needs receive modified content that aligns with their developmental abilities. For example, when regular students study butterfly metamorphosis through experiments, ABK students may engage in coloring stages of the butterfly's life, focusing on recognition and fine motor skills. These differentiated practices reflect Tomlinson's (2001) model of differentiated instruction, providing access without lowering expectations.

Lessons are structured based on students' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), ensuring optimal challenge and support. Teachers employ scaffolding techniques and visual aids to enhance understanding and engagement. Instruction is delivered in small-group formats, with shadow

teachers providing one-on-one assistance as needed. Importantly, ABK students remain physically and socially included in general classrooms, reinforcing the value of shared educational experiences. This intentional integration promotes both academic and socio-emotional development in inclusive settings.

Support System and Therapeutic Interventions

SOU's therapeutic support system is robust and integrated into daily school life. ABK students receive therapy twice a week, targeting areas such as communication skills, emotional regulation, motor development, and independence. These sessions are closely coordinated with classroom activities to reinforce learning across contexts. For instance, therapy goals like turn-taking or following instructions are practiced both during therapy and group work. This consistent reinforcement helps students generalize skills beyond isolated settings.

Therapeutic services are supported by shadow teachers—professionally trained co-teachers employed directly by the school. This is a significant departure from the common practice in Indonesia where shadow teachers are often privately hired by parents, leading to inconsistency. At SOU, the institutionalization of these roles ensures that all ABK students receive equal and professional support. Shadow teachers are present not only during academics but also extracurricular activities, field trips, and camping, providing holistic inclusion. This institutional commitment ensures continuity, equity, and a clear chain of accountability.

Distribution and Roles of Co-Teachers (Shadow Teachers)

The classroom structure and shadow teacher assignments demonstrate careful planning to balance instructional effectiveness with support needs. In grade 1, for example, four ABK students—three with hearing impairments and one with ADHD—are supported by two shadow teachers. In grades 2 and 3, the school assigns three and two shadow teachers respectively, based on the specific attention and independence levels of the ABK students. The shadow teachers assist not only in academic tasks but also in daily routines like toileting and meal times. This ensures that ABK students participate fully in school life without being overly dependent.

This thoughtful distribution reflects SOU's commitment to optimal adult–student ratios, reducing the likelihood of teacher burnout and increasing personalized support. The presence of shadow teachers also serves as a bridge between regular teachers and ABK students, helping mediate classroom expectations and emotional needs. Over time, the goal is to gradually reduce reliance on shadow teachers as students become more independent. In several cases, students

previously requiring full-time assistance were able to learn autonomously, a clear indicator of successful intervention. This system demonstrates how inclusion can foster long-term independence rather than dependency. Findings from grade-level observation are summarized below:

Table 1. ABK Students, Diagnoses, and Accompanying Teachers in Schools

Grade	Total Students	ABK Students	Diagnoses/Challenges	Shadow Teachers
1	21	4	3 hearing-impaired, 1 ADHD	2
2	20	3	ADHD traits, focus & self-help delays	3
3	20	3	Attention deficits	2
4	25	2	ADHD, emotional regulation challenges	2
5	20	2	Emotional delays, high cognitive ability	2

This distribution illustrates SOU's attention to maintaining effective **student–teacher ratios** for inclusive classrooms, minimizing burnout, and maximizing individualized attention.

Professional Development and Organizational Culture

The school culture at SOU reflects a deep-rooted commitment to inclusivity, extending from leadership to support staff. All new teachers are required to complete orientation on inclusive education strategies, natural pedagogy, and classroom management for diverse learners. Even non-academic staff—such as security guards—are trained in interacting appropriately with ABK students. Weekly teacher meetings focus on reflection, therapy progress, and strategy refinement, promoting a culture of continuous professional growth. This comprehensive training infrastructure ensures that inclusion is practiced consistently across the school ecosystem.

SOU's philosophy emphasizes shared responsibility for all learners, dismantling the separation between regular and inclusive education. Teachers work collaboratively with therapists and shadow teachers to co-plan lessons and address emerging challenges. New hires are mentored through a peer-support model that aligns pedagogy with the school's naturalist framework. The barefoot policy and outdoor learning settings foster flexibility and sensory integration, which benefit both ABK and non-ABK students. This institutional alignment between values, practice, and learning environment exemplifies Booth and Ainscow's (2002) "Index for Inclusion" framework.

Inclusive Evaluation and Parent Partnership

SOU's assessment system accommodates both regular and ABK students through a differentiated evaluation model. All students receive narrative reports every three months and

formal achievement assessments every six months. For ABK students, an additional layer of reporting includes bi-weekly therapy progress notes and ILP updates. These records provide a multidimensional view of each child's development, integrating academic, emotional, and social progress. Parents are not passive recipients but active partners in the evaluation process, participating in review meetings and ILP revisions.

Parent–school collaboration is institutionalized through regular forums, home visits, and open communication channels. This fosters mutual understanding and consistency in behavior expectations and learning reinforcement. The trust built between families and the school enhances student outcomes and reduces the risk of disengagement. Research supports the significance of such partnerships in sustaining inclusive education (Hornby, 2011). By viewing parents as co-educators, SOU ensures that inclusion extends beyond the school walls into the home and community.

Outdoor and Social Inclusion Programs

SOU expands inclusion beyond academic boundaries by integrating ABK students into outdoor learning and social experiences. Weekly outbound sessions, nature walks, and annual camping activities are attended by all students with appropriate accommodations. Shadow teachers participate to support but also to gradually build student independence. This approach not only nurtures physical resilience but also fosters peer interaction and group cooperation. Students learn teamwork, problem-solving, and responsibility in real-life contexts.

These inclusive experiences are intentionally designed to promote social acceptance and reduce stigma. By involving ABK students in shared activities, the school cultivates empathy and a sense of belonging among all students. Participation in these programs also contributes to identity formation and confidence in ABK learners. This aspect of inclusion addresses one of the most neglected components of special education: socio-emotional integration. Ultimately, SOU's practice reflects a vision of inclusion that is experiential, holistic, and transformative.

Discussions

This study seeks to understand how inclusive education is implemented at the elementary level of the School of Universe (SOU) in Bogor, with specific emphasis on its integration with the Nature School philosophy. In line with the research objective, this section presents the findings based on direct observation and documentation during the school's daily activities. The data collected is categorized into core themes that reflect the practical and philosophical dimensions of inclusive practices at SOU. Each theme is analyzed through a critical lens and compared with

relevant academic literature to highlight both the uniqueness and challenges of inclusive education in an alternative school setting. By presenting both empirical data and theoretical insights, the study provides a comprehensive overview of how inclusive values are translated into educational practices within the framework of nature-based learning.

School of Universe (SOU) Bogor consistently reflects a philosophical commitment to inclusive education rooted in humanist and holistic educational values. From its foundational vision, SOU positions each child as a unique learner who deserves equal opportunity and tailored support in learning. This reflects UNESCO's (2009) vision of inclusive education as a transformative approach to address and respond to the diversity of needs of all learners. The school rejects a deficit model of disability, aligning with Booth & Ainscow's (2011) Index for Inclusion, where barriers are addressed by adapting the school environment rather than "fixing" the child. In SOU, inclusion is seen not only as a practice but as an ethical and pedagogical stance.

One of the central strategies of SOU is its flexible and personalized curriculum that allows for the modification and adaptation of learning goals. Teachers design modules that can be duplicated or simplified for children with special needs, ensuring they still engage meaningfully in the same learning journey. This approach is in line with Tomlinson's (2014) differentiated instruction model, which advocates for responsive teaching that considers learners' readiness, interests, and profiles. The curriculum at SOU is not fixed or rigid; it grows with the child, allowing room for exploration and contextualized learning based on student needs. The use of project-based learning further supports active participation from diverse learners.

Being a nature school, SOU integrates outdoor experiential learning as a foundation for its inclusive approach. Students with learning challenges often thrive better in natural settings due to reduced sensory overload, physical freedom, and real-life engagement (Knight, 2013). Observations reveal that students with ADHD, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and dyslexia exhibit increased focus and motivation during gardening, animal care, and environmental exploration activities. These findings resonate with Sobel's (2004) arguments that nature-based pedagogy nurtures executive functioning and emotional regulation in neurodiverse learners. This natural approach helps bridge learning gaps by minimizing formal rigidity.

The implementation of inclusive education at SOU is also supported by the active involvement of trained shadow teachers. These assistants do not merely accompany but co-facilitate learning through tailored scaffolding strategies. According to Sapon-Shevin (2007), effective

inclusion requires adult support that is responsive, empathetic, and pedagogically skilled. At SOU, pendamping are included in teacher planning sessions and play crucial roles during both academic and non-academic activities. Their presence also ensures that children with special needs feel safe, acknowledged, and competent within the community of learners.

Another key finding is the strong culture of teacher collaboration at SOU. Teachers work closely with pendamping, therapists, and parents to review individual education plans (IEPs) and learning progress. Regular case discussions and teacher reflections support adaptive decision-making. This collaboration fosters professional learning communities (DuFour et al., 2006), which have been shown to improve inclusive practices. Moreover, peer learning among students is also encouraged, allowing students to support one another through cooperative projects and inclusive group dynamics.

Assessment at SOU is not solely based on cognitive performance but includes behavioral growth, emotional expression, and social participation. The school adopts a portfolio-based and narrative assessment approach, aligning with Black & Wiliam's (2009) formative assessment principles. Teachers use observation notes, visual documentation, and student reflections to monitor progress. This inclusive assessment format accommodates students with limited verbal expression or alternative communication styles, especially important for students with autism or speech delay.

SOU places strong emphasis on engaging parents as co-educators, particularly for families of children with special needs. Parental involvement is not limited to administrative roles but includes educational support at home, shared decision-making, and counseling sessions. Epstein's (2001) model of parental involvement is evident here, promoting school-family-community partnerships that support inclusive outcomes. This is particularly crucial in Indonesian contexts where stigma against children with disabilities remains prevalent (Sujarwo et al., 2021). SOU's approach actively counters such stigma through inclusive community education.

Despite the strengths, the school faces limitations in terms of infrastructure. Some classroom and sanitation facilities are not fully accessible for children with mobility challenges. In addition, the school has limited availability of on-site therapists or special educators, which can slow down intervention for certain students. These constraints echo findings by Effendi & Zubaidah (2019), who note that many inclusive schools in Indonesia lack sufficient resources and expertise. Nonetheless, SOU attempts to bridge these gaps through flexible space use and external

professional collaboration.

Inclusion at SOU is not restricted to classroom settings. Students with special needs participate actively in music, drama, farming, and camping activities. Teachers report that these activities enhance self-esteem, creativity, and communication skills in students with special needs. According to Florian & Black-Hawkins (2011), true inclusion must extend beyond the academic sphere into all aspects of school life. SOU's holistic design ensures that no child is excluded from the social fabric of the school.

Perhaps most profoundly, the inclusive practices at SOU cultivate empathy and moral consciousness in all students. Observations and interviews reveal that children are encouraged to support peers who learn differently, using non-judgmental language and cooperative play. This confirms Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory that development occurs through social interaction. The inclusive ethos thus not only benefits children with special needs but enriches the moral and emotional growth of the entire learning community.

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CONCLUSION

The implementation of inclusive education at the School of Universe (SOU), Bogor, reflects a holistic, philosophical, and practical integration of inclusive values within a nature-based educational framework. Unlike many institutions where inclusion is approached as a compliance mandate, SOU embodies inclusivity as a foundational ethos embedded in its admission policies, curriculum design, therapeutic support, teacher collaboration, and school culture. The school's commitment to "education for all" is evident through its proactive enrollment of children with special needs (ABK), even prior to national mandates, and its sustained efforts to provide tailored support through individualized learning plans, shadow teachers, and differentiated instructional strategies.

The natural school environment further enhances inclusion by reducing sensory overload and providing authentic, experiential learning opportunities that benefit all students, particularly those with neurodiversities. Moreover, the strong partnership with parents and the broader learning community underscores SOU's inclusive approach as not only educational but also social and developmental. While limitations remain—particularly in physical accessibility and the availability

of specialized personnel—SOU demonstrates that with philosophical clarity, structural adaptation, and community commitment, inclusive education can thrive even in alternative school models.

This study contributes to the growing discourse on inclusive education by offering an in-depth look at how inclusion can be realized meaningfully beyond the constraints of conventional formal schooling. It encourages policymakers, educators, and researchers to reimagine inclusive education not just as a policy requirement but as a transformative practice grounded in respect, dignity, and educational justice.

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