**Research Question and Guiding Questions for International Travel**

My research was focused on special education since I have taught special education for about 6 years as both an inclusion and resource teacher. My inquiry was “What does special education look like in your schools?” I then compared what I learned about special education to the special education programming we have in the United States. I asked this question to teachers and students at public, private, and vocational schools. I also asked administrators, team leads, superintendents, and a regional director this same question, and I made many discoveries some of which were very surprising. My purpose behind this question was to understand what special education looked like in the Philippines to see if there was anything we could learn and use in the United States.

The main discovery I made was the special education in the Philippines is very rudimentary. I imagine this is probably similar to how special education was treated in the United States in the 1960s, prior to laws being passed in 1975 that supported states in meeting the individual needs of disabled children – currently, there are no laws to protect students with special needs in the Philippines, therefore, IDEA, LRE, and IEPs do not exist. On the flip side, I also learned that the Department of Education does feel that meeting the needs of students with special needs is a priority and at the college level, they are encouraging youth to pursue a career and take college courses in special education, so there is a push and demand for teachers with those qualifications. The regional director would also like to have at least one SPED school in each municipality so that there is a school that would provide the accommodations and modifications necessary for those children. Right now, the Philippines does have SPED schools in some municipalities. The interesting thing about the Sped schools is they cater both to gifted students as well as those with disabilities. Most of the disabilities I saw were children who have a visual or hearing impairments or they have been diagnosed with Autism. Those students had a separate room where they received services but I did not see them completely integrated into the general education setting with their regular ed peers. A majority of the schools in the Philippines do not have service providers assigned to them, if you need a child diagnosed the school would need to fly a specialist from Manila (the capital) to the school to perform the appropriate diagnostics. It’s really only the families with money and are financially stable who can hire somebody to diagnose their child and/or hire additional support.

As I learned more about the state of special education in the Philippines I had many reflections. The greatest one was that I had a much greater appreciation for where the United States stands regarding special education, in comparison, it is clear that we are very progressive in the field. I also appreciated how critical passing a law like IDEA is and felt gratitude for living in a country that recognizes that need. I also felt shocked that students with disabilities were not receiving any support and that there are most likely hundreds of children who need the additional support but are unidentified. It makes me sad to know that even with a free education being provided in the Philippines, many students are not receiving the support they need because I know that their lives could be so different with supports. Knowing that in the U.S. most of the needs are identified as children who have a specific learning disability I was amazed that in my observations and conversations I did not hear about or see students with specific learning disabilities. This led me to feeling amazed at how much progress IDEA has led our country to make and how far we’ve come. Even though I know the special education programming has a long ways to go with much room for improvement, I felt thankful for what has been accomplished in the last 40 years. I also felt disbelief in learning that service providers are not at all of the schools, since in the U.S. every school has service providers available, at least a few times a week. The SPED school organization in the Philippines seemed like it could be a really strong model since the advanced students could support those who are disabled and both groups would feel a sense of belonging. Overall, it was clear that special education in the Philippines has a long way to go and they need support in getting the proper education around what it means to have different disabilities and how disabilities manifest themselves. I do not feel that it is right that students are getting passed over and ignored because there is not the proper supports in place to identify the child and then create a plan to catch them up.

I also had many lingering questions as I visited and inquired about special education. See below for the questions I still need answers to.

* I wonder if special education is rudimentary because there is not a budget to support the requirements of passing a law similar to IDEA?
* Do the SPED schools actually benefit both populations of students, gifted and disabled? What evidence is there to support that? Why are there special schools just for those populations, is it more expensive to make those groups inclusive at the school?
* Why hasn’t a law like IDEA been passed yet? Is the government in the Philippines working to pass a law similar to that?
* I wonder if there is an awareness of other types of disabilities, i.e. specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, or traumatic brain injury? I wonder if they know how to diagnose those other disabilities?
* Is there a lack of individuals trained in the different services like speech therapy, orthopedics, psychology? Is there a lack of money to pay these service providers?
* What happens with all of the students who are left unsupported? Do they just drop out of school and work for their parents? Do the parents know how to support their children who may have a disability?