

For my observations, I went to a special education classroom and a regular education classroom that had students in it with specific learning disabilities. The following observations show the drastic differences between each type of instruction.

My first observation was in a special education classroom at Mahan Elementary School in Norwich, Connecticut. This special education classroom contains mostly students who have motor skill and mobility disabilities. The majority of the students in the classroom have great difficulty verbally communicating. However, there are a few students who have slightly less demanding disabilities.

During my time in this classroom, there were two students who I noticed immediately. Both were fifth grade students with completely different needs. Student A had mild autism. This particular student had a para with them at all times and was mainstreamed into the regular education classroom for certain classes. Student B was confined to a wheel chair and could not talk. This student was learning basic motor and mobility skills and was not mainstreamed into the regular education classroom.

A para was with each student at all times. While the special education teacher worked with individual students, the paras would work with the student on specific things. During my observation, Student A was working on a Scholastic News article. The teacher read the article to the student and then had the para work with the student to answer the questions. With Student B, the teacher worked on a padded area, allowing the student to lie on the floor instead of being in a wheel chair. While on the floor, the teacher used the iPad to help the student trace their names and trace the letters. The teacher held the student's finger and helped guide them into tracing the words. Due to

the student's lack of mobility, the teacher did most of the work. After their time together, the teacher put the student back in the wheel chair and had the para read to the student.

Upon further reflection, I feel that the teacher could have worked better with Student A than with Student B. With Student B, the para and teacher work on the same things with the student, but with Student A, the teacher actually has a chance to teach. I understand that there are certain difficulties when teaching students with disabilities, but I feel that with Student A, the teacher could have made more of an effort to engage the child. Instead of just reading the article to the student, the teacher could have made the student point to the words while the teacher reads to them. This way the child is engaged on the activity and is focusing on the words to help try to better understand them.

For my second observation, I went to a fourth grade, regular education classroom at Moriarty Elementary School in Norwich. This classroom had a few students who had disabilities, but none as drastic as the special education classroom I was previously in. The teacher only specified that Student A had a DRA of 14 and Student B had a DRA of 20, but both were good at math. It can be inferred that both students have a specific learning disability in reading, but from the observation you can tell that the students also have other behavioral problems. Both students were seated at the front of the class, on opposite sides of the board. The remainder of the class was separated into groups of four. There were no special education teachers or paras in the classroom during this time.

The teacher started off the lesson by reintroducing the topic they had worked on from the previous day's lesson. The topic they were working on was multiplying by two's. The teacher instructed students that they would be using a 99-count chart to complete all the multipliers and to color-code them. The teacher then instructed the

students that they could work amongst their groups to finish the assignment. After giving the initial instructions, the teacher then walked to the two students in the front and told them they could work together and then repeated the instructions.

As the students were working in groups, the teacher walked around the class and asked students questions about what they had done so far. The teacher then had to repeat the instructions to the two students in the front. While the teacher was walking around the whole time, Students A and B had been fooling around instead of working. This continued for about ten more minutes until finally, the teacher had to sit with the two students and get them to focus. I overheard the teacher tell the two students that if it was easier, they could skip the counting part on the 99-chart first, circle the multipliers and then do the count. The teacher proceeded to demonstrate how it was to be done. The teacher then told the two students that other students required help and that they should begin working on the assignment the way they were just showed. As the teacher was helping another student, the two students (Student A and Student B) continued to goof off. This pretty much kept up for the remainder of the lesson. The teacher had to help other students and Students A and B both stopped working the minute the teacher walked away. They were also reminded numerous times to focus and stay on task. At the end of the lesson, half the class was almost finished while the other half was nowhere near done. I actually was a substitute at this school the following day and the teacher was still finishing the lesson that next day.

While I do not think there was anything wrong with the lesson, it is hard to walk into a lesson that is half way completed and try to follow what is going on. I do feel that students were able to get something out of the lesson based on the answers they were

giving the teacher. However, I do feel that in order for this lesson to have run smoother, the teacher should have a para present that can keep Students A and B focused and on track. I am also conflicted on whether or not it was a good idea to let the two students work together. On one hand, the students are doing the exact same work that no one else is doing. On the other hand, these two students obviously have behavioral problems that only get worse when they are paired together.

Both of these observations were drastically different but gave me a profound understanding of what it is like to teach students with disabilities. Both observations showed me that students with disabilities require a lot of attention, regardless of the disability. Some students are more self-sufficient than others, but when it comes to education, they all require the same level of care. These observations also helped me see how other teachers handle these situations. I will most likely end up in a classroom similar to the one I observed at Moriarty. The teacher in this classroom displayed patience and understanding for Students A and B and even though there was only one teacher present, that one teacher was able to help everyone as best as they could. The only change I would recommend would be to get a para in all the classrooms there. I've been apart of this district for 2 years and a helping hand could always be used in some of these classrooms. There are paras at Moriarty, but they are only in the classrooms with students who have severe learning or physical disabilities. My observation at Mahan was a completely different ballgame, but it helped me understand just how hard special education can be. The students in that class have to be fed and changed and some of them cannot even communicate to tell the teacher something is wrong. I do like that these students were never left alone. Each student, or a pair of students, had a para

present at all times and they were always interacting with the children. I have been in one other special education classroom where this was not the case. It broke my heart to see some of these kids being left alone in a corner all day, but at Mahan these students were made to feel important. The special education teacher at Mahan does an excellent job of understanding the needs of their students and by observing the classroom; you can see this.