

A Special Look at Special Education

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Questions:

1. What has changed in special education throughout the years?
 - a. Mrs. Marman stated that not too much has changed throughout her years in special education, although there have been a lot more 'homebound students'. She also stated that there are more students diagnosed with emotional disturbance than before.
2. How do students qualify for services?
 - a. Students qualify through an IEP.
3. How do you regularly assess the progress of the students?
 - a. They assess the progress of the students through classes – to see what level they need to be in – and through MAP testing – getting to know them personally.
4. How did you get into special education?
 - a. Mrs. Marman told us she got into special education through being a para in a special education classroom.
5. What would make you more marketable as a special education teacher?
 - a. A strategit degree, along with a special education degree, Mrs. Marman said, would make someone more marketable.
6. What does a normal day look like for your students?
 - a. Most of Mrs. Marman's students are in general education classes and meet with her only once throughout the day.
7. How do you decide when to start transitioning students into the general classroom?
 - a. Mrs. Marman's class is an 'elective class' of sorts. As stated, most of her students are in all general education classes and only see her once a day, so she does not have to deal with transitioning kids into a general classroom setting because most of them are there for most of the day already.
8. Have you ever questioned being in special education?
 - a. According to Mrs. Marman, every day as a teacher has made her question being in special education.
9. How has your experiences with the parents been?
 - a. For Mrs. Marman, a majority of her parents are involved, but if they aren't, she doesn't take it personally.
10. What is the most important thing for a general education teacher to know?
 - a. Communication, Mrs. Marman said, is key. General education teachers need to communicated with their students in special education and vice versa. Students should learn how to advocate for themselves and ask for accomadations, and general education teachers should work to supply those accomodations for their students.

Introduction

Some professions leave their employers feeling like they do not matter. These people may feel like their job is not important, and that their work benefits no one. Countless people have referred to their jobs in such terms as these, and this is greatly disappointing. Working a job day in and day out that feels pointless and insufficient easily causes people to feel sad and burdened by their lives, and that is something no one should ever experience. After experiencing an observation in a special education classroom, we feel certain that our future careers in this education will not leave us feeling worthless or insufficient. Rather, we felt confident and inspired to make a difference in my future career, especially in the lives of students and their families. The opportunity to observe Mrs. Marman's special education classroom at Mandan High School proved to be a life-changing experience for all of us, which we will be forever grateful for.

Impressions

Fortunately for me, I have experienced multiple special education settings in my lifetime, due to the fact that my mother is a special education paraprofessional. For years, I sat in her classroom after school and interacted with students who have disabilities. However, these classrooms were always in elementary schools rather than junior high or high school. After observing the children and staff in my mother's classroom, I knew that I would certainly not follow in her footsteps. I could never have imagined myself as a special education teacher, but that has obviously changed. Clearly, elementary school students are completely different from junior high and high school students. Mrs. Marman's students solidified this fact for me, and I am elated that they did.

Upon entering the classroom, I immediately felt as if it were a very comfortable and safe environment, which is especially important for students in special education. The students were so nice and friendly, and clearly respected Mrs. Marman and their peers. They had such a strong bond with Mrs. Marman, and it was so amazing seeing teacher-student reactions unfold in such a positive and healthy way. The entire atmosphere of the classroom was amazing, and I am so thankful that Mrs. Marman's class was the one we were able to observe. Interviewing Mrs. Marman and the other teacher in the classroom was also very satisfying. These women answered every single one of our questions with certainty and honesty, no matter what the question asked. Perhaps the most important aspect of this observation, however, involved the teachers' apparent love for their career. It was obvious that these women enjoy their jobs, and feel like they make a difference in their students' lives. They understand how much the students rely on them, and that is something that I wish to reciprocate as a future teacher. This observation and interview clarified my decision of pursuing special education, and I am now certain that I am on the right path. *-Allison Hoffman*

I have been aware of special education my whole life. My oldest brother was diagnosed with Asperger's when I was barely two years old. He went to a special preschool and has done different therapies throughout his schooling. He went between the resource room and the general education room a lot during his elementary school years. Honestly, I thought it was normal for

people to be in the special education room. I knew that room was a safe and comfortable space for him when the general education classroom was not. He could go there to calm down and feel at home when things just were not right in the general classroom. Knowing this, I was not surprised to feel so at home in Mrs. Marman's classroom. Her classroom was warm and inviting from the minute I walked in. I knew this was a safe class that students with special needs could retreat to if needed.

I had an amazing time shadowing Mrs. Marman at Mandan High School. I loved how they had special education and SLP in the same room. It is such a great idea, as there sometimes can be overlap between those two areas – there was for my brother. Mrs. Marman did a wonderful job answering our questions and giving us a background as to what she does. It was eye-opening to hear from her what we as general educators can do to better work with the special education teachers and their students. I only wish we could have stayed longer and seen a full school day. Overall, it was a very positive experience and I whole-heartedly recommend it to anyone even considering education. – *Meg Shonsey*

Shadowing in a special education classroom was a completely new experience for me. I attended a public school for the majority of my life and I saw the students in special education around and in my classes, however I never knew about the vast network going on behind what I saw. Through the Education for Exceptional Learners class and shadowing Mrs. Marman's classroom I have learned more than I ever expected to learn about special education. I remember certain experiences from my public school where the special education didn't make sense to me or I didn't understand what the educators were doing- however the Education for Exceptional Learners in combination with shadowing Mrs. Marman's classroom has explained many of those scenarios.

Similar to what Allison said above, I noticed a distinct difference in the atmosphere of Mrs. Marman's classroom as soon as we walked in. I was surprised by how casual it seemed, much more casual than what most general education classrooms are. However, in addition, I felt there was an element of dedication that was much stronger than in general education. Teachers go into education because they care about the job and about their students, but I felt that the teachers in special education care about the job and their students even more, on a completely different level. I currently don't plan on going into special education, however I do plan to eventually teach at my former high school, which is a small, private school that has very limited special education resources. While we don't have many students, if any, with any serious disabilities, there are many students that struggle with anxiety issues and other mental illnesses. I think it would make me more marketable as a teacher and a better teacher overall if I had more experience with special education so I could better help these students that will be in my classes. Since I've had no prior experience or education in special education, this interviewing experience has peaked my interest in the field and I am eager to know more so that I can become a better educator. –*Christina Caticchio*

Conclusion

Clearly, all of us benefited from this incredible experience, and consider it a life-changing experience. While special education is not in all of our futures, we can all agree that this experience was very important and beneficial to all of us. All students in a public school

usually come across special education students, and perhaps interact with them on occasion. However, these students never get the chance to experience and observe special education classrooms themselves. Most people do not know how the world of special education works, and are rather unfamiliar with the students themselves. This experience gave us a special insight to what these environments are really like, which many other people do not get. We are extraordinarily thankful for the chance to observe Mrs. Marman's class, and it is one we will never forget.