

# Classroom Observation Report

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I completed my classroom observations at two different institutions. The first institution I visited was \*\*\*. This school is for students with disabilities beginning at age twenty-one. The school is broken into several classrooms based on the students' level of ability. The building appeared to be a warehouse or factory converted into a school. The other school I visited was the \*\*\*\*\*. This school serves students with multiple disabilities from birth to age twenty-one. This school is also broken into several classrooms, but the division is based on age. \*\*\*\*\* is a part of a larger facility containing a Low Vision Rehabilitation Center, \*\*\*\*\*, and the \*\*\*\*\* Legal Clinic. The students at \*\*\* were diagnosed with a variety of disabilities including: cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, mild to moderate retardation, autism, and speech/language impairment. All of the students at \*\*\*\*\* have multiple disabilities described as severe and profound. These students are classified as unable to function in a general school setting.

In regard to instruction, the students at \*\* worked on different curriculum depending on the classroom. The curriculum included: worksheets, puzzles, hygiene, and daily living. The students with Down syndrome primarily focused on daily living. This included instruction on counting money, catching the bus, and asking for help. These students were also instructed in hygiene through the modeling of brushing and/or combing their hair and brushing their teeth. The students with autism worked on hygiene as well. They brushed their teeth and did 45 minutes worth of exercise. A videotape on walking was used to lead the exercise. These students also worked on puzzles. The puzzles they worked on depended on their ability. Some worked on picture puzzles, others word search, some building blocks, and still others worked on matching colors and shapes. One student worked on mathematics problems including addition, subtraction, and multiplication. There was also a speech specialist who worked with some of the autistic students on pronouncing words. She would say a word and the student would try to repeat it. In the classroom where the majority of the students had speech/language impairments, the students completed worksheets. Because it was Valentine's day they worked on a worksheet about the holiday. The teacher read the background information and then the class answered multiple-choice questions pertaining to the information read. Some of the students readily answered the questions; others struggled. This classroom also completed a worksheet on "Little Red Riding Hood," which included instruction on

synonyms. The students were to replace several words in the story with synonyms. Unfortunately, the students at \*\*\*\*\* didn't receive much instruction while I was there. I was told that typically students in this classroom are given instruction in mathematics, language arts, science, and other core subjects. The day I observed, a number of teachers were absent and they were short-staffed. Instruction was basic, to say the least. For example, mathematics instruction consisted of lifting a student's hand and the instructor counting how many times the student's hand was lifted. Science and hygiene were one in the same. Instruction was difficult because many of the students were blind and/or nonverbal. Thus, communication was limited.

At \*\*, each teacher used a different method for teaching. In one classroom, the teacher just handed out worksheets and puzzles. When the students completed them they came to her desk. She checked the worksheets and /or puzzles for completion and correctness. If they were complete and correct she commended the students. If it wasn't she informed the student of what they needed to do to complete the assignment. The teacher for the students with Down syndrome and mild retardation lectured from the front of the classroom. He also facilitated open discussion in the classroom. On one of my visits he led a classroom debate on the election. The students expressed their feelings about Barack Obama. There was also an assistant/aide who worked independently with students on completing their worksheets on daily living. In the autistic classroom the speech specialist also worked independently with students. The teacher instructed from her desk. Most of the time was spent on exercise and the students worked independently on puzzles. The speech specialist assisted some of the students in completing their puzzles. At \*\*\*\*\* I didn't see much instruction. Some of the teachers talked to the students and asked them how they were feeling. Some of the students responded by smiling. The students watched movies for a couple hours. The older children watched "The Mighty Ducks" and the younger children watched "The Little Mermaid." One teacher read to the students from children's story books. He allowed me to read to one student using equipment that amplified the size of the book greatly. I also worked with that student on a computer program that allowed for him to choose an animal and hear the sound the animal makes. He, Mario, continually slammed his hands on the keyboard. Eventually, we locked the computer. We then went back to book reading. Mario was

non-verbal so he didn't respond to me verbally, but he smiled when some of the pictures showed up on the computer screen.

I noted very few behavioral problems. However, a few of the students refused to do their work, took belongings from other students, and/or neglected to return to the classroom. Some of the students at \*\* were allowed to go to the bathroom and go to other classrooms by themselves. In fact, students were sent to run errands as a reward. When the students misbehaved, in the ways mentioned above, the teacher would use a stern voice to inform the student of what he/she expected of them. They all complied. All of the students seemed to be familiar with the academic work they were given. However, when the students struggled they were given individual attention—usually by the classroom aide. One student became frustrated with her word search. She put her head down. The substitute teacher asked her if she was okay. She didn't reply, but she handed him her worksheet. He encouraged her to continue and she continued working on the worksheet. Because there was generally one teacher and one aide in the classroom, there were very few problems with classroom management. One student assigned to brush his teeth began drinking out of the urinal. He'd been gone for half-an-hour. Apparently, the teacher forgot he was still outside of the classroom. She began the exercise program without him. After a case manager brought him back to the classroom explaining what happened the teacher's aide was assigned to take him to brush his teeth. In one of the classrooms a student began to hit himself and yell out bad names and profanities. The teacher took him out of the classroom. Generally, there are two teachers in that classroom. However, one of the teachers was away for training that day. The teacher later explained to me that students who misbehave in that class are always sent outside of the classroom. This is to ensure that they do not hurt themselves or anyone else. Also, it tends to upset the other students when their classmates begin to misbehave. At \*\*\*\*\* the students did not receive any punishment for misbehaving. They were spoken to calmly. Depending on what is needed, teachers from various classrooms would be called to help a student to calm down. Sometimes the students—those that could communicate verbally—would request a particular teacher and/or aide to assist them. All of the teachers, aides, specialists, and paraprofessionals helped with the

students at both schools. At \*\*\*\*\* there was also a nurse on call to assist teachers with gastrointestinal tubes, diaper changing, suction, and feeding.

I really enjoyed my time at both schools. It was a pleasure to meet the students. I was allowed to interact with the students at \*\* more than at \*\*\*\*\*. I believe this was due to the severity of their disabilities. There are also a lot more stipulations and rules to be followed at \*\*\*\*\* because of the age of the students. Before helping or volunteering with the students at \*\*\*\*\* one is actually required to submit a background check and drug test. I later read this information in the volunteer application. Some of the teachers allowed me to read and play with the students; others did not. I, especially enjoyed working with the students at \*\* with Down syndrome. They had so much personality—that I noted—because they talked to me more. Many of them came up to me and held conversations with me. In each class I noticed that there was a particular student that I seemed to be drawn too. Likewise, some students (verbal and nonverbal) seemed to be excited to have me in class and approached me; others didn't pay any attention to me.

One thing that I noticed at both institutions was that rarely did the students receive instruction in any of the core academic subjects. At \*\*\*\*\* one of the teachers discussed this with me. She mentioned that due to the No Child Left Behind Act the school was trying to implement more of the core academic subjects into the curriculum, but that it was too difficult. At \*\* I noticed a few students working on problems in mathematics. However, they were working on these problems independently and with no feedback or instruction from the teacher. These students seemed to be receiving similar worksheets—although in different classrooms—and working on similar problems repeatedly. I would like to see these students receiving instruction from a teacher on mathematics in accord with their level of ability and readiness. I would also like to see some of the life sciences (i.e. physics, chemistry, and biology) taught to the students. Of course, this would be, again, in accord with their abilities and readiness. I intend to adapt some of the physics curriculum that I have for the students at \*\*. I would like to then put together a physics workshop for them. The director of \*\* seems to be excited about me volunteering to teach the students.

This experience has made me more aware of how vast and diverse disabilities are. I now realize that a knowledge of the various disabilities and how they affect learning is necessary to better serve these students. I am confident that I would like to work with students with exceptional needs in the future. I think that developing skills in discipline and classroom management is also essential to being able to efficiently serve these students. This opportunity has helped me to realize that working with exceptional students can be very rewarding.