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Project 1- Interview a Classroom Teacher about Inclusion

Knowing she had a background in Special Education, I was interested in learning the thoughts Mrs. Connie Meyer has about inclusion. Mrs. Meyer teaches second grade at St. John Lutheran School in Seward. When I asked if I could schedule a time to speak with her, Mrs. Meyer invited me to come observe her classroom so I could see inclusion taking place. I came in the morning and observed the Religion lesson for about an hour and returned after the school day ended so I could talk with Mrs. Meyer further.

To begin, I was curious to learn more about this particular second grader who receives Special Education via the Blue House. This student spends the first 45 minutes of the school day with his Special Education teacher working on reading; when he is finished, he comes to Mrs. Meyer's classroom and spends the rest of the day there. This Special Education teacher is the one responsible for writing the student's IEP. There are also 30-minute blocks of time where he will leave to work with a speech therapist. A volunteer comes four times a week for approximately 20 minutes each time to work with the student.

Within Mrs. Meyer's classroom, the student works on the same curriculum as the other second graders; though for a period of time near the beginning of the school year, he needed a first grade book. He sits next to an "elbow buddy," a fellow second grader, who helps him in various ways with the material. When I was there, I saw the elbow buddy going over reading words with him. The student with the disability would read down a list of words as the elbow buddy checked to make sure he was getting them correct. He also had his classmate "finger spell"- write two of the words with his fingers on the table. This is to help create muscle memory in his arms for writing letters. The student's Special Education teacher encourages Mrs.

Meyer to use as many sensory and kinesthetic activities as possible with him, and recommends that two hours throughout the day are devoted to these activities. Mrs. Meyer admits that these activities probably do not add up to that amount of time since it is difficult to incorporate them in to his studies without taking away from other students' time.

Mrs. Meyer values inclusion as a way to grow compassion; even though a person may not be as strong as others in a particular area, we still share Jesus' love with them. She says it helps her other students see that we all have different gifts, just like this student with a disability has a talent that makes him an engaging storyteller. She hopes her students come to understand that everyone is at some sort of disadvantage, but others can point out what someone else *is* good at doing. Another advantage surfaces for the student's elbow buddy. As a caregiver, this student receives the benefit of having the material reinforced as he helps his classmate learn it.

As far as disadvantages go, Mrs. Meyer says this student's materials take more time to prepare and organize. When I inquired what a situation would look like where she would judge the disadvantages to outweigh the advantages, she said that would be when the inclusion became detrimental to the other students. This could be in various ways such as a behavior disorder or a physical disorder that would demand a lot of attention or personal care (like if a student needed diapers) thus taking too much time away from the other students and interrupted their learning. She would also be concerned if the student with a disability was abusive to the other children.

Mrs. Meyer concluded our time together by showing me examples of materials and curriculum used by her student with a disability. She had an example of a reading comprehension test the county uses to assess the second graders' reading levels. Throughout the interview, what stood out to me was her sincere concern that her students receive the support that each of them needs, referencing Vygotsky's model of scaffolding. She is especially excited

whenever she can learn new techniques to help her students in Special Education learn the most they can.