

Recently I had an interview with special education teacher. I've put a number of questions and got the answers, which helped me realize that working with students with disabilities is rather challenging. Here are my questions:

- What does she like most about her job as a Special ED teacher?

The answer was that since she was a student in high school and later on at University, she realized that the best career for her must be connected with kids and teaching. It is really challenging and rewarding to work with children, especially those who need more care and special education. So, when she had a choice what job will suit her more than any other, she didn't hesitate with the proper decision. She has been working with kids from diapers for over twenty years now up to their twenties. As for me, that is really a long period of time to be sure about one's preferences in life, and if you know how to work you will succeed in your job.

- How many Students does she have on your case load?

She answered that the number of students on her caseload is fourteen, but it can vary, for example, last year they were sixteen and this year she had a couple drop out. One could think that fourteen is not a big amount, but when I realized that it is necessary to teach each of them, I was really surprised. Then I asked:

- What does she like or dislike about collaboration with a regular teacher?

As any other job, it has advantages and disadvantages. What she likes most about collaboration for the students with disabilities – this is the ability for them to have access to the same curriculum as the general population. She also likes the fact that they are held to the same standards and must meet the same criteria in order to graduate. She must admit her negative attitude to collaboration with regular teachers, as it does not give students with disabilities the opportunity to work on their area of deficit, such as reading or writing. They never get that secluded one-on-one support to try and help strengthen those areas of weakness. From the teacher's answer I understood that, the most important feature for a special education teacher is to have a strong personality. Then I was interested about the following:

- Which disability is the hardest to work with as a special education teacher?

She considers the hardest disability to work with as a special education teacher, the students with autism. Most of such students only think in literal terms, therefore it is very difficult for the students to write on a “what if” topic. It means that, if the students were asked to write about only bringing one thing to the planet Mars, what would it be and explain why, the students would have a difficult time answering that. They would most likely say, “I am not going to Mars and I would not need to bring anything there”. It is really challenging teaching students with autism how to be successful writers. Anyway, she has admitted that they have success with formatting and organizing essays, but the content is usually weak. I understood from her answer that one can overcome any difficulties having a strong desire to succeed and reach one’s objections. My next question was:

- What was the most severe or hardest disability that student had, that was the hardest or most stressful to help a student with?

The teacher answered that, working with severe and profound students is a difficult job. The classroom teachers are expected to tube feed students and catheterize students, what is the hardest disability that students have. That was the job she had worked in and would never do again, because it was too stressful for her. I had a special feeling to her response and it was admiration of her courage and patience. Further I wondered:

- What does she think about the common core that all Schools have to adapt to currently regarding her students on her caseload?

Her opinion as to this question was that the common core that all Schools have to adapt to currently regarding students on a caseload, is the area of Literature. She has worked with all high school grade levels. Each grade level is responsible for teaching student’s vocabulary, grammar, written expression, and reading comprehension. Many students were really excellent in Literature. Students’ success – that’s what make any teacher to be satisfied with her /his job. Recently I have got to know about Universal Design Learning, so my next question was:

- Does she know about UDL? (Universal Design Learning)What is her opinion on it?

She answered that there are different approaches to educating students with disabilities. One of them is UDL (Universal Design Learning). UDL sounds like differentiated learning, which is, when you try and meet the needs of each student based on their learning style. Differentiated

instruction is used in the classrooms, but not for every assignment. It does take a lot of planning and efforts in order for it to be successful. It was also interesting to me to know about the classroom climate and I asked her:

- What is her opinion on the classroom climate scale and how it relates to her students?

Answering this question she let me know that she believes that the classroom climate is very important, while working with disabled students. The classroom environment is controlled by the dynamics of the room. Good classroom management and a solid lesson create a positive learning environment for all learners. This is one of the main objectives in her job. Though she was a little bit tired to answer my questions, I asked her a couple of them more:

- Has she had to help students with emotional or behavioral disorders? If so, what was hard about it?

She admitted that, students with disabilities often have emotional or behavioral disorders and it's not easy to work with them, as they need special care. She has worked with students that have emotional and behavioral disorders, and it can be challenging at times. Having a positive attitude towards the student and letting them know that you are on their side creates a positive relationship, which over all benefits not only the student, but also the class, which they are participating in. In conclusion I asked her:

- If she has a chance to do her education all over again, would she still be in special Education?

I was really glad to hear that, if she had a chance to do her education all over again, she would still be in Special Education. It is rewarding to watch the students' progress and be successful in the classroom. She told me that she likes her job and the awareness of being helpful and make happy those kids who need her support and care. It is very important to her to have a job that brings her moral satisfaction. When she makes her students feel happy, she feels happy too. This is her philosophy and her way of life. I have discovered to my self that we have similar philosophy and objections in life and job.