

**Inclusive Schooling Observation and Interview**

**June 3, 2002**

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*Hammond Elementary School*

*Interviewees:*

*, Special Education Teacher*

*Grade 5 Teacher*

*Grade 3 Teacher*

*Science Teacher*

*, Grade 2 Teacher*

*Visits: May 24, 2002*

*And*

*May 29, 2002*

For my observation and interview I decided to visit an Elementary School to examine how Special Education Students are included in the General Education Class for the entire day. I was able to speak with the Special Education Teacher and General Education Teachers. The school is located in a residential neighborhood that appears to be a low economic class in the social class system, most students receive free and/or reduced lunch. Neighborhood homes, a few stores and a railroad track surrounds this newly constructed beautiful two-story school. As I approached the school on a rainy Friday morning in May, I found that the neighborhood was very serene and quiet. The school's physical appearance was amazing. It covered several blocks and was designed in somewhat of a triangular design, there was a large playground, basketball court, a track that surrounded the entire school and soccer nets. The school appeared to be an oasis in the middle of closely knit homes that are in need of repair. As I enter the school I felt like this is a home away from home. There is a nice sitting area that seems ideal for reading surrounded by vibrant colored objects, plants, large framed pictures, depicting different people and brightly colored paint captivating the hallways.

I walked into the office and the staff was very nice and professional. I was introduced to Ms. T, the Special Education Teacher for the school and we went up to her office with A, a fourth grade student, where my journey began. Ms. T assisted A with one of his assignments for the morning. A was working on math problems that consisted of subtracting two digit numbers. The math problems were modified by reducing the numbers to only one digit and allowing A to use a number line to subtract. I later learned that A spends most of the day with Ms. T until the appropriate classroom setting is arranged for A. A shows characteristics of a student with special needs, but is not classified at this time. One reason A is out of the classroom is because of behavioral problems. Ms. T tells me that most students demonstrate behavioral problems due to the lack of understanding of classroom work.

My interview with Ms. T was held in her office and while we walked through the school. Ms. T has only provided special education services in this particular school since November of 2001. She is also certified in the areas of Emotional Impairment and Learning Disabilities. The school has a population of about 734 students in grades pre-school through grade five. The special education students that are included in the general

education classes are labeled as Learning Disabled and the school's racial mix is a blend of Hispanic Americans, African Americans and Caucasians.

Ms. T provides support in classes everyday to twenty-six students, servicing not only students that qualify for special education, but other general education students as well. Her focus is of more "push in" services as opposed to "pull out". Normally students are not removed from the classroom, but at times they are pulled out into a smaller area or room for individualized instruction or speech services. In each classroom there is also a separate room within the classroom that is utilized in different ways, such as an area for one on one instruction or some students use the room as an independent work area. Sometimes the special education students are pulled out for testing and to receive small group instruction.

Ms. T's role as the special education teacher is to meet with the general education teachers as often as needed and provide strategies and support. The strategies are ways to adapt the physical environment, modify curriculum or have students work in collaborative pairs to enhance learning. In addition to the Special Education Teacher there is also a Speech and Language Pathologist, a Social Worker, Nurse, Reading Recovery for first grade students and an Elevated Reading Program for all grades that also provide support. Since the majority of the community and school population stems from Hispanic descent, Spanish is the primary language for some members of the school community. Some special education students speak Spanish and English and translate conversations or information to their parents who primarily speak Spanish, which makes them feel very good. The office staff is also bilingual and provides support in IEPC Meetings for example. I asked Ms. T about her feelings and concerns regarding inclusion. She informed me that she has "no problem with including students with milder disabilities. It is only questioned with students who are SXI and medically fragile, when concern is needed because of medical training involved. Inclusion can be improved if teachers buy into multi-level instruction and the administration and staff also buy into the idea."

I like to refer to this visit as a general overview. Ms. T. apologizes for my visit on this day, a lot of students are absent and the normal class schedule is not followed, it is a half-day of school. I had an opportunity to look into the Library/Media Center,

Computer Lab, Art Room, Science Room and other classrooms. The classrooms all seem to be designed the same with a television, VCR, DVD player, telephone, lavatory and at least four computers in each classroom. We continue into the Science Room and the teacher informs me that his class is set up for success and not failure. For most assignments the students chose what medium they would like to complete their assignment in. The science teacher also assigns work that the students can complete at their own level. I also noticed that outside of each classroom students' work is displayed on the walls. The work that is displayed is very admirable and a nice addition to the school environment. This is also a good sign of components that should be visible around a school (Peterson 235).

On my second visit to the school I observed a fifth grade class during a first period class. In this class, there were twenty-two students present, two of which were labeled Learning Disabled. The students are writing down spelling words as they are dictated by the teacher for an upcoming test. The special education students are not noticeable. I did notice that one student is sitting off to the side, somewhat away from the class and causing a few disturbances. I assume that maybe this one of Ms. T's "students". This assumption was totally wrong. Ms. T walked around the class observing all of the students and then begins to focus on the two students who have Learning Disabilities. The two learning disabled students both seem to be withdrawn or not engaged in what the teacher is doing, as do most of the students in the class. The special education students also receive Speech and Language Services and Social Work services. I later learn that L, one learning disabled student is not withdrawn at all. The classroom is brightly colored, posters filled the walls, which were written in English and Spanish, classroom rules were posted, and the agenda for the day was on the chalkboard. I did not notice any reading books besides textbooks in the classroom or no evidence of the students work displayed. Most of the students interacted with the teacher while she wrote the spelling words on the board by raising hands and shouting out answers. The telephone rang a few times and the teacher seemed to be bothered by the interruption. The student's desks are arranged in tables of six, that facilitates interaction among the students (Peterson 235). The interactions that were occurring may not have been appropriate. Some girls at one table are engaged in their own conversations, some

students have their heads down and boys are brushing their hair. Z, the other special education student is receiving help from Ms. T and L doesn't seem to be paying attention any more. Z is basically getting encouragement from Ms. Taylor while he writes the spelling words on paper. Z needs an environment where there is structure to keep him on task. The students are not really participating fully in the discussion. The students later begin reading a story out of their Literature Text and seem to enjoy the story. I am also informed that L and Z are able to complete the same assignments as the other students in the class. Their assignments are sometimes modified in a step-by-step formation for example.

We travel downstairs to a second grade classroom where the students are actively working on different projects. Some students are working in pairs and others alone. The students move freely around the room to get supplies and converse with their teacher and the aide. It is not evident who the teacher is and who the aide is until the teacher approaches me and lets me know that C, a learning disabled student does the same work as the other students, but in a reduced manner. I find C on the computer looking up various things on the Internet. C is having a great time on the computer as well as other students. C doesn't need assistance at this time and is able to work independently on the computer. C meets with the Social Worker and Speech and Language Pathologist as well. There were a lot of picture books and trade books in the classroom, almost like a little library. Ms. T informs me that all of her students' spelling lists for the week are modified. If the students are assigned fifteen words they can choose ten that they would like to study. The students have positive results with this process and are extremely proud when they see a high grade on the test paper.

The science teacher is preparing for a fifth grade class that is working on a project concerning the solar system. The teacher greets the students at the door and instructs them to get the materials they need and complete the projects that must be completed by Friday. In this class there are two students who are Learning Disabled. The teacher designs his assignments and lessons so all students can learn. I am eagerly waiting to observe the students in action and we are interrupted by the announcement that the students have to report to rehearsal for graduation. The teacher says, "sometimes the interruptions are an inconvenience. When am I going to have a chance to teach?"

I enter a third grade class and they are chatting in low voices while working on estimation problems. As soon as we enter we are advised that S is absent today. S is one student that receives support from Ms. T as well as three other students. A few general education students ask for help from Ms. T with the assignment. The general education teacher seems to keep the students motivated and involved. I felt like she really had a genuine concern for her students. R is accommodated by working on basic addition problems and uses counters to aid with the math. Ms. T later plans to get R a number line so the red circular plastic counters will not be so obvious. R receives Speech and Language Services and also meets with the Social Worker. The teacher tells me that R just began to speak English a few months ago and he has improved very much. The teacher informs me that since I am present they are going to “show off” what excellent readers they are how they have been practicing reading with expression. It was such a coincidence that I just read the same story two days ago. Just about each student read aloud and very well. The teacher was also thrilled that most of her students are on grade level. J, the other student with a learning disability works fine alone after he has a jump start from Ms. T. J thought that he would get away with not reading by pretending to be asleep, but that didn’t work. J is a little shy, but is actually a good reader. R is the last to read and reads with the help of Ms. T. There is a board in the class that is designated for “A” work only and may be a possible area for concern (Peterson 235). The teacher announces that about three students could not read. I felt a little uneasy hearing that comment. She immediately said that those students are bilingual, which made me feel better, knowing they were having difficulty with the English language. The teacher also told me that she did not think that J was one of Ms. T’s “students” because of his achievement in the classroom.

For the classes that I observed the school showed support for inclusion by creating an enriched curriculum for all students and in-class supports and accommodations (Peterson 235). Some research has also shown that children in inclusive settings show greater social competence, spend more time with peers, less time alone and more positive academic learning in integrated settings. As I spoke with L, I noticed that she was very mature socially. Once I began to ask questions about herself in general she

lit up with delight. I also watched as she worked on a reading worksheet and only had two questions regarding the assignment.

This school is a Comer School, which has guidelines for building support for personal, social and moral development of children that is fundamental for a child's learning environment (Peterson 70). The school's Local School Community Organization (LSCO) also provides support to all students in the school, by supplying the students with various resources. Grade level teachers meet once a week during preparation periods to discuss different things concerning the students. This Elementary School has strong support internally and externally for all students in the school. The school seemed to be operating very effectively due to the strong support and collaboration of the members of the educational staff and community. This is a nice example of showing how including students with special needs in the general education classroom can have positive results.

### **Works Cited**

Peterson, Michael and Mishael Hittie. Inclusive Teaching, Creating Effective Schools For All Learners. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, Projected Publication Date 2002.