

Inclusive Schooling Observation

Simmons High School
Lamar School District

Teachers: For classes observed

Mixed Chorus: Harris
Speech I: Taylor
Tutor IEP: Redmon
Tutor IEP: Rohr
English 11: Manow
Para-Professional: Kreitzmann
Teachers: for unobserved classes
German I: Thompson
APP Algebra: Rhymer
Psychology: Spady

Note: All names of school and individuals have been changed.

Student Observed: Female

Grade: 11
Grade Standing: 320/561
GPA: 2.68
Age: 17
Diagnosis: Spina Bifida
Physically challenged, limited mobility, left-side weakness, wheelchair, shunt

Nancy Pacitto

3/1/02

School Background Information

Simmons High School is located in a suburb of a major city in a Mid-western state and is part of the Lamar Community School District. There are 1725 students in tenth through twelfth grades. Of the students who were ninth graders in 1996, 98 percent earned diplomas in 2000. In 2000, based on MEAP tests, 75% of the graduating class received endorsed diplomas in Math, Science-65 percent, Writing-70 percent and 27.6 percent in Social Studies. Seventy percent enrolled in two or four year colleges. Three percent enrolled in vocational or career training. The 1999-00 dropout rate was two percent. The number of students in advanced placement level classes has risen from 12 percent in 1998 to 25 percent in 2001.

The Lamar Special Education Programs include: bilingual education, learning disabled, emotionally impaired, speech/language impaired, educable mentally impaired, pre-primary impaired, visually impaired, hearing impaired, and physically and otherwise impaired.

The student population is ethnically diverse with a very low percentage of African Americans. The largest minority group is certainly Arab-American. The Arab American population is mainly Chaldean (Catholic). It is well documented that the Catholic-Arab population usually settles in Macomb County whereas the Muslim-Arab population often settles in the Dearborn area. Asian-Americans and Asian-Indians are a small part of the student population. Most of the students are of European origin. In the hallways and the cafeteria, there did not appear to be any distinct ethnic cliques. The school has recently established a Cultural Diversity Council.

The Lamar Community School District has experienced a huge population growth in the last three years and Simmons High School is at building capacity. Many of the students come from middle-class families with two working parents and a majority of the households are tied to the automobile and manufacturing industries in the Detroit area. There are several training programs sponsored by General Motors, Ford, and Daimler-Chrysler that are available to the students year round. Co-op, intern and mentor programs tie many of the students to the business community.

A wide variety of support services and programs are also available. This school has a counseling department that consists of five counselors, two social workers, and a school psychologist. A "Positive Choices Program" is an extensive network provided by the school that helps students with emotional difficulties. Support peer groups, crisis intervention, stress, smoking, alcoholism, drug addiction, anger management, grief counseling and *circle of friends* (for students who have problems socializing with other students) are available to the students. The student I observed attends *circle of friends* once a week. The Student Needs Assessment Committees (SNAC) and the IEPT's convene on a regular basis to assess special needs student. Students whose needs cannot be met by this school are encouraged to enroll in the Lamar Community Schools' Alternative Education Program.

The social needs of these high school students are channeled into numerous activities. Every imaginable program is available to these students. Band, sports, drama, music, science, math, language, journalism etc. have special after school activities or student clubs. Sporting events, dances, musicals, plays are all well attended. There are 27 varsity and junior varsity teams, including 13 female teams and 14 male teams. 39% of the student body compete on these teams.

This school has several media rooms and a strong emphasis is placed on computer literacy. The Media Center is extensive and includes over 16,500 books and videos. The widespread use of technology provides the student body with every opportunity for learning and independent thinking. The students are encouraged to do research on the Internet. Students who do not have home computers might be at a slight disadvantage and this might make it difficult for some to do their homework at home. But I have observed that computer access passes are available during all study hours. 850 classes use the media room and each classroom has two computer terminals and all students have computer accessibility.

The school also has a swimming pool and a state of the art fitness center.

Academically, socially, emotionally and physically, Simmons High School has developed a Blue Ribbon High School.

The faculty has a blend of experienced teachers as well as a number of new young teachers. There are ninety-four professional staff members, of which 85% hold masters, specialist or doctorate degrees. In the last four years, thirty-four new teachers have been added to the staff. Almost all of the teachers are of European descent and most are female. The teachers I met were of various ages and all were female.

This school also makes every effort to provide the students with a very safe, professional learning environment. A building security plan is in place and Simmons works closely with the Sterling Heights police Department. There are adult monitors at the end of each corridor and in front of the Main Office. The school doors are locked during school hours. Students are not allowed to leave the building for lunch. There are only five minutes between class periods and all the students went from class to class quickly and quietly.

The student body seemed friendly and relaxed and there was not any evidence of rowdiness or discipline problems. The hallways are empty and silent during class periods.

Parent involvement in school activities is also prevalent. Strong parent/teacher/student relationships are promoted throughout the school year during different academic, social and sporting events.

Disabled students enjoy a high level of accessibility. The school is only one floor and wheel chair ramps and bathrooms are provided throughout the building. There is a school improvement committee that monitors the needs of special students.

The school has made attempts at inclusion. There are 150 special needs students who are included in some regular classrooms but not all. IEP Tutorials seem to function as the special classroom where special needs students are allocated to go to at least once a day. These classrooms are located throughout the building. A mix of learning disabled, physically challenged and emotionally challenged students sat together in the IEP Tutorial Classroom. Only Special Education teachers *monitor* the IEP Tutorial Classrooms. Some Special Education teachers teach only disabled students in classroom settings whereas others co-teach different subjects in regular classrooms throughout the school day. Each of the IEP Tutorials I attended had less than ten students. Regular classrooms that are co-taught have about twenty-five students in attendance. Regular classroom teachers provide the IEP teacher with detailed homework and daily assignments for each student. The purpose of the IEP Tutorial classroom is to provide extra help with subjects or assignments, monitor students' progress, check homework assignments and provide weekly forms updating regular teachers of the students' weaknesses. Most of the interaction between the IEP teacher and the regular classroom teacher is done on-line via e-mail. The IEP Tutorial grade is based on a point system.

My Student "CC" Background Information

CC is a seventeen year old female born with Spina bifida, a birth condition characterized by an incomplete closure of the spine. Children born with this condition may have varying degrees of muscle paralysis, bladder and bowel problems, loss of skin sensation and spine and limb problems. Spina bifida is not rare. It occurs in one of every 1,000 children born. Most babies with spina bifida develop hydrocephalus, an accumulation of fluid in the brain. The pressure can cause brain damage, seizures or blindness. Parents who have spina bifida or one child with spina bifida, increase their chances of having another child with the condition.

CC has had over forty surgeries and medical procedures since birth. A shunt has been inserted to drain excess brain fluid. Bracing and surgery have been necessary to achieve standing and walking. She has had early and aggressive physical therapy to improve her range of motion and promote normal motor development. She has to have bladder and bowel management programs which include catheterization. A special aide changes her catheter before lunch and after her sixth hour. New anti-seizure medication has been recently prescribed.

CC is smaller than average in stature. Her upper body seems to have developed normally. Her spine and lower limbs are somewhat contorted. Her left side is much weaker than her right. She can use braces or canes and has in the past. During school hours, she chooses to get around only by wheelchair. This wheelchair is not motorized and there are only five minutes between class periods.

The left side of her face droops slightly. Her speech is awkward and hesitant. I am used to working with foreign students and accents. Because of my experiences with various speech patterns, I was easily able to understand her after only a short conversation. But I did notice that others cannot understand as well or as quickly. She cannot write cursive and her printing is immature. It is very difficult and time-consuming for her to write legibly. I also noticed that the teachers were not objective about her writing and motor skill problems.

CC grades last semester in regular classes were:

German I	A	B+	C	B+
APP Algebra	C+	C	A	B-
Mixed Chorus	A-	A	D	B+
English 11	C	C	C+	C
Speech I	A	A	A	A
Psychology	C	C-	D	C-

This semester, she dropped Psychology. She is now enrolled in IEP Tutorials for English 11 and APP Algebra.

Last semester, she participated in handicapped swimming events through the *SOS (Students Offering Services)* and has attended several summer camps for students with disabilities. She attended a *Ballet in Wheelchairs* program in Cleveland last year. She participates in Choral activities at her school and also at Macomb Community College. CC attends *Circle of Friends* meetings at the school once a week. She attends Bible classes at her church and goes to mass every Sunday with her parents. She has a weekend job as a ticket taker at an AMC movie theater and proudly informed me that she just recently received her one year pin.

CC has a father who works as a project manager for IBM. Her mother is German-born and fluent in German and English. She is an office manager for an American-German small company based in Troy. CC has one brother who attends the University of Michigan.

Observations & Interviews

I went to Simmons high School on a Monday morning at 9:30 am.

I was amazed at the number of late model cars in the parking lot. I actually parked in the last available spot in the back of the lot. There were at least six large Lamar Community School Buses parked near the main entrance. The school is very large, clean and well maintained. The interior is painted white and appears very sterile.

I had to sign in with an adult hallway monitor before I was allowed to go to the Main Office. The receptionist asked a student to take me to Dr. Pearson's Office. He wasn't quite sure where it was but we managed to find it after three inquiries. The Special Services Office is at the end of the building and is not designated in any way. I entered Dr. Pearson's Office and she suggested that we go back to the Main Office and review CC's IEP and school files. She apologized because she did not have them readily available for me. We entered a file room and I was given CC's file to look at for several minutes. I made notes and we discussed CC's diagnosis, IQ, classes, grades and personality. It struck me as odd, that this discussion took place in front of three clerical staff members.

I liked Dr. Pearson right away. She seemed confident that CC would enjoy our day together and told me that CC was quite excited about my project. Dr. Pearson told me that CC's IQ was determined to be around 80. She personally felt that it was a mistake. She also told me that CC was an outspoken student who participated in many activities during and after school hours. She made me aware that CC would be accompanied by an aide, Mrs. Kreitzmann. Mrs. Kreitzmann was CC's tutor for English and Math and would help CC with her catheter three times during the school day.

I asked several questions about many of the notes in the IEP. It stated that CC's parents were worried about the stress in their child's life. Last September, CC's shunt became dysfunctional during a swim meet and the EMS had to be called. She suffered a severe seizure and was subsequently hospitalized for several weeks. This accounted for her lower grades in the third quarter of last semester.

I asked why CC was taking German and why she had dropped Psychology. Dr. Pearson stated that CC's mother and grandmother were from Germany and that CC not her parents had requested the class. CC wanted to drop Psychology because taking notes during class was too difficult for her.

I was a bit alarmed by several references to stress in the IEP and that her parents wanted her to learn to be more independent. They asked the school to help CC accomplish more of her daily tasks without the assistance of her aide. I decided to observe CC's behavior rather than ask about these comments.

I asked Dr. Pearson what CC's goals were. She told me that CC had stated last year that she wanted to be a missionary. I found that to be a rather unusual career for a seventeen year old. Dr. Pearson pointed out that this was unrealistic. She felt that though CC was religious, she had very little compassion or empathy and would not make a good missionary because of her behavior toward others.

I asked Dr. Pearson whether CC had any plans to go to college. She said that CC was very frail and her grades had not adjusted themselves after her last hospital stay. She pointed out that CC did not get too much help with her assignments at home because her parents worked long hours. Dr. Pearson found it difficult to contact them at home late at night. She believed that Christina needed extra help in order to catch up to her peers in her regular classes. She also felt that CC would be better off staying an extra year in high school.

Dr. Pearson then told me that we would proceed to the Mixed Chorus Room and observe CC there. She assured me that CC was a special person with an engaging personality.

As I walked down the long, white, silent hall between class periods, I felt very confused by the IEP report, medical report, parents' written concerns, grades, IQ and Dr. Pearson's somewhat contradictory comments about CC's personality and social skills.

Dr. Pearson took me into the Vocal Room and introduced me to CC after the class had finished singing. She informed me that she had a class to teach and that I could meet up with her at the end of the school day.

The Vocal Room was large and of course white. I had viewed CC singing with the other students. She appeared to be enjoying herself. She was in a wheelchair at the front of the room. The other students were somewhat distanced from her. After class, she engaged in conversation with another girl. CC gave her money for a candy sale. They seemed friendly and the young girl helped CC move her wheelchair in order to exit the room. I did not meet the male vocal coach. CC seemed shy for all of two minutes. I asked her questions and she never balked. She was forthright and pleasant.

We waited for her aide, Mrs. Kreitzmann. She introduced herself and then told me that she would have to empty CC's catheter. Other student's were within hearing distance. I wished she had spoken a little more discreetly. Mrs. Kreitzmann asked me if I would mind going to the cafeteria with CC. It occurred to me that she had a difficult time maneuvering the crowded hallway. Students progressed to their classes in a very orderly manner and they were not boisterous or loud.

CC told me that she didn't want to eat anything and usually went to the cafeteria to hang out with her friends. I was taken aback. The place was so clean and quiet. There were three adult monitors who checked in each student.

There were long tables with benches bolted to them. CC seemed distraught. She was looking for her friend LL and couldn't find her anywhere. We went to the last table in the far corner. CC pulled her wheelchair up to the far end of the table and looked dejected. A girl told CC that LL was out sick.

I looked around and saw everyone engaged in quiet, happy conversations. I didn't see any other physically challenged students in the cafeteria. I had not seen any in the halls at any time. I wondered where they were.

CC told me that LL was an angel. She had hydrocephalus and a shunt like CC. I asked if LL was also in a wheelchair. CC said that LL used braces and canes. CC told me that LL was her best friend in the entire world and she wished that I could meet her. She told me that before she met LL, she never had a real friend like herself, physically challenged. My heart ached. There was something wrong with this picture. The confusion I felt earlier was too troubling not to address. CC and I talked for the entire hour. I asked the questions and she poured her heart out to me. She changed my life. Now, how could I change hers?

CC told me about her teachers. I asked if she liked Chorus. She told me that she loved music and wanted to sing professionally. She told me that she loved her Chorus teacher last semester but did not like Mr. Harris, her new teacher. He didn't make her feel comfortable at all.

I mentioned Dr. Pearson's comments about CC becoming a missionary. CC corrected me and told me that last year she had wanted to be a lay minister in the Catholic Church but she had another goal now. She told me that her faith kept her strong and that she wanted to help others like herself realize that they were not alone.

She proceeded to tell me about her experience with the Choral Workshop at Macomb Community College that she participated in last spring. She told me that she never missed a rehearsal on either school nights or weekends for six weeks. She said that she was deeply committed to the program but that the director didn't like her. She worked very hard and memorized every note and every song. The director informed her the last week of rehearsals that she would not be allowed to go on stage because she would *ruin the look of the performance*. He also told her that her wheelchair was too much trouble and was too difficult to get on stage. CC told me that she cried constantly for a week. She told me that she prayed and God stepped in. Several of the girls in the soprano section went to the director and informed him that if CC didn't go onstage for the performance, they would not perform at all. Essentially, they threatened to boycott on behalf of CC. CC was allowed to sing on stage. She glowed when she told me that it was all worth it and she cried out of joy when she sang, "Bridge Over Troubled Water." She definitely realized the irony of the song and pointed it out to me. As she articulated this episode, I felt certain that I was listening to the vocabulary, sentence structure and thought process of a very intelligent young woman. I wondered exactly how her IQ had been determined.

CC also told me that she had recently gone to the Sweetheart Dance with a young man. She described her dress, the music and the event.

I believed that I could ask her anything and that she would answer truthfully. I asked her difficult and painful questions about her illness, her schooling, her parents, her teachers, her goals. She never flinched. She pulled no punches. She knew more about sadness, isolation, determination and life than most of those students in that cafeteria.

I asked about her medical condition. She told me that she had been hospitalized over forty times that she could remember. She told me that she still went to physical therapy once a week. When she was younger, she went almost every day. She told me about her swimming incident. It happened on her seventeenth birthday. She sensed something was wrong early in the day. She told me that she knows her

own body well and she knows when her shunt is not working properly. When she dove into the pool, the shunt quit functioning. She experienced a grand mal seizure. She never remembered having one before. Usually, her seizures had been slight and short lasting. I asked how the other students reacted. She told me that all the girls were crying and a few were hysterical when the EMS came. She said that they all cared about her and always checked on her when she was in the pool. I asked if she planned to take swimming again. I sensed her discomfort when she said that she didn't want anything more to do with swimming. It had been a required PE class for graduation for regular students. She emphasized that it was a lousy way to spend her seventeenth birthday. She was hospitalized for three weeks and missed two more at home.

I asked how she kept up with her schoolwork. She told me that her assignments were sent home and she completed them as required. I asked if her teachers had taken her illness into consideration, when they determined her grade for that quarter. She told me that she had the same requirements for attendance, tests and homework as the other students in the regular, English, German, Chorus and Psychology classes. The Speech and App Algebra class teachers had made adjustments for her absences.

A young man passed CC and she asked him about a uniform. She told him that she needed another one and that the one she had been given didn't fit. He blew her off quickly and seemed very uncomfortable talking to her. He told her that he couldn't help her at all. CC told me that she worked at an AMC theater as a ticket taker on weekends but that her uniform pants were too big. The young man was her supervisor at the theater. She said that she couldn't always tear the tickets right and she misdirected people to the wrong theaters sometimes but that she liked her job. Earlier, she had told me about a Britney Spears movie she had seen that weekend. I assumed that she had gone there with a group of friends. Now I realized that free movie passes were a perk of her job. She proudly informed me that she had her one year pin and hoped to continue working at the theater until she graduated.

Other than this one encounter, no other students talked to CC. I wondered if it was because of me. I thought not. She seemed very lonely and mentioned LL several times during our lunch period. I asked where her other friends were. She told me she only hung out with LL.

I wondered why she didn't eat. She sipped a water bottle and had to catch the water on the side of her mouth a lot. She apologized and kept right on talking. I believe that she is embarrassed to eat lunch in public.

I asked about her school history. She has always been enrolled in regular classes in regular schools. In elementary and junior high, she was the only student in the school in a wheelchair. I said that it appeared that it was the same case in high school. She told me that she liked high school a lot because there were more things to do and LL was usually around to hang out with. I sensed her isolation and unhappiness. It became more pronounced as we spoke of her older brother. He attends the University of Michigan and calls CC once a week. She told me that she adores him and misses him all the time.

She spoke lovingly of her father, mother and grandmother and told me that her grandmother lives in Germany. She wants to be able to speak German fluently in order to surprise her grandmother the next time she comes to the US to visit. I told her I admired her tenacity since German was a very difficult language to learn.

I asked if she had plans to go to college. She wants to be a teacher in fine arts and design programs for students who are physically challenged. Her face brightened and she became animated as she proceeded to tell me her ideas about this goal. She believes that she can make a difference in their lives. I sensed that she knew what special students needed most. She emphatically stated that just because she couldn't walk didn't mean that she couldn't sing.

We discussed my background with the symphony, public television and radio. I told her about all the risks that I had to take in my lifetime. I felt that my age was sometimes a hindrance but that I had to take advantage of every opportunity. I did not want to preach or patronize. Music was our common interest. I could feel that she was beginning to trust me.

The conversation had been filled with pain and sadness up to this point. But now I saw her smile and I knew that my sense of humor had made her laugh. I felt emotionally challenged. I would help her find joy today.

Leaving the cafeteria was difficult and cumbersome. There are only five minutes between class periods. CC constantly griped about that. She felt embarrassed when she entered a classroom tardy.

Speech I with Ms. Taylor was an enlightening experience. She was a young and very beautiful young woman. I introduced myself to her before class. She was perfunctory in her politeness. I wondered if I made her nervous. CC once again sat at the end of a long table on the far side of the room near the door. Only one other student, a young girl sat at the same table. All of the students seemed disinterested. Ms. Taylor started the class with a Shh!

I had never been in a room with a teacher who constantly shushed her students to get their attention. It was demeaning. I will quote her,

“Shh, Listen up people.

This is your assignment for tomorrow. You are to either give or receive an award. Shh, pay attention people. Your speech must be two minutes. No more, no less. If it is one minute and 58 seconds, you will receive no credit. Shh, I said listen up. Don't come in tomorrow unprepared because you didn't hear me. Shh, pick a partner. Shh, one of you will receive the award. Shh, decide what physical object will be the award. Those of you receiving the award. Shh, must have an acceptance speech—two minutes, no more – no less”.

She is interrupted by a tardy boy.

“Sit!”

He tells her, “What am I a dog?”

She replies,

Write that down in your teacher evaluation—that I have emotionally traumatized you.”

He gets out his notebook and says, “OK, Let me see, I'll write all this down. Will you sign it?”

Once again, she says,

“Sit down and listen”. She is distracted by two students and commands them personally to pay attention.

“I don't want any of you showing up tomorrow with car keys and telling me that the other student gets a perfect driving award. Pick your partner and for the rest of the class time, decide what you are going to do and write it down. I will come around the room. Tell me what physical object you are going to use. Decide today or no grade tomorrow.”

While Ms. Taylor is speaking, CC whispers to me that she is a very cocky teacher. Ms. Taylor tells CC that she cannot be partners with the young, shy girl with braces on her teeth because they are always partners. The young girl is even more distraught than CC about this. The teacher chooses another girl from across the room and forces her to become CC's partner. The tall, lovely girl is not happy at all. I worry that I may be part of the problem. But it soon becomes evident that these girls have never spoken to each other before today. I am on a mission to fix that.

No one seems to know where to start on the assignment. The young girl with braces doesn't have a partner now. Ms. Taylor assigns an absent girl to be her partner. This girl is on the verge of tears. I tell her that I will be her proxy partner for the class time and not to worry.

I ask the girls what their interests are. The tall girl tells me that she likes clothes, movies and music. I notice that she is wearing an expensive, antique necklace and compliment her on it. CC tells us that the tall girl always looks great. The tall girl is flattered and begins to talk a little. The tall girl gets up and goes to the teacher. She fixes the teacher's hair. The entire time the teacher was talking, a large section of her hair was sticking out. The teacher thanked the girl and was visibly embarrassed. She proceeded to moralize how the girl was a good friend for doing that to her.

When the tall girl came back to our table, I told her that she should give out a golden brush award for the best hairdresser. All four of us laughed and the ice melted quickly. I noticed that CC talked about everything, clothes, hair, and style. She had as much knowledge about these things as any other seventeen year old.

She told me that her last speech was about an invention and she had received an A. She wanted to invent a big box that she could enter every morning that would dress her. She would pick the clothes out the night before and in the morning magically she would be dressed in two minutes. I sensed her lack of confidence about her hairstyle and clothing taste. But I was relentless. Humor would guide me through this maze of teenage angst.

It was decided that CC would accept a golden hairbrush award from the tall girl. The tall girl told CC that she couldn't understand her and kept asking her to repeat herself. CC decided to switch roles but the tall girl didn't like the hair idea. CC told her that she had great clothes. I asked if they watched Style TV. They all had. We talked about Madonna, Britney Spears, J Lo and decided that the tall girl would receive a golden hanger award for the best sense of style. The conversation became enjoyable and fun. At one point, CC said to me this is the most fun I have ever had in school. You are really cool. I wish you were my teacher.

So many things were said among the four of us that were uplifting to CC. CC recited her speech to the tall girl and asked her to write it down since her handwriting was so bad. The tall girl was amazed at what CC had written about her. The tall girl had been self-conscious about what to wear for the award presentation and CC helped her choose an outfit. The tall girl never once struggled again in trying to understand CC. CC's speech was full of praise and was very well organized. I was very proud of her.

The shy girl with braces told me that she wanted to be a doctor. Now I understood why she was the only one who usually partnered with CC. The shy girl was compassionate and soft spoken. We discussed her speech with Ms. Taylor. Ms. Taylor suggested a stethoscope as award object. The young girl confessed that she had a secret desire to be a hip hop dancer with a big star on stage. We all offered suggestions as to

what her speech could be about. I let them do most of the talking but I did lead them in the right direction with several questions.

The shy girl decided to give the absent girl an award for Ms. Teen For A Day. She seemed at a loss for words. We concluded that personality, kindness and a sense of humor would be the attributes that determined this award and physical beauty would not be mentioned at all.

Each of the girls participated in the conversation. Something miraculous happened. They became just three ordinary girls discussing hair, fashion, careers, insecurities and character. Each of them came to their own conclusions about what really determines a good person. By the end of the class period, they were all friendly and very happy.

All three of the girls seemed dismayed when the class was over. They expressed their wishes that we had more time together. I noticed that Ms. Taylor sat with the same group for the last half hour of the period. These students were well-dressed and good looking, the *in clique*. The rest of the class didn't appear to be having much fun struggling with the assignment. Most grumbled as they left class and several made remarks about how stupid the assignment was to them.

Ms. Taylor could have accomplished so much more if she had interacted with all of the students. Her constant shushing at the beginning of the class was inappropriate. I thought that maybe she wanted to prove to me that she had control in her classroom. But the opposite proved true. She avoided CC and never asked about her assignment. From the students' comments about the teacher, I suspect that Ms. Taylor is regarded by many of her students as snobby and bossy.

CC was greeted by Mrs. Kreitzmann. Mrs. Kreitzmann pushed CC's wheelchair to the next class period, an IEP English Tutorial. I was overwhelmed by the size of the school since we had to get to the other side of the building. I had to dodge students left and right and CC grumbled constantly about how hard it was for her to get from one class to another. Mrs. Kreitzmann helped CC get situated and left the room to tutor another student.

Ms. Redmon, a Special Education teacher monitored the class. She did not greet me or CC. I introduced myself to her. She had a sandwich in her hand and said she was running late. She went directly to her computer and started typing.

I expected a full class and was dumbstruck when only five students entered the room. Ms. Redmon sat on one of the desks and asked everyone what they did on their winter break. She proceeded to tell them how sore she was from skiing and how she had slipped and fallen - not on the slopes but near the Jacuzzi. She commented, "I may never be able to ski again because my back hurts so much."

One girl told the story about how her cousin broke his back skiing and that her mother wouldn't allow her near the slopes. Another student said that he had stayed home and just watched TV. Ms. Redmon never spoke to CC.

The insensitivity of this dialogue disturbed me immensely. CC was invisible in this classroom. The five students sat very far apart from each other. The classroom had regular desks with one round table in the back of the room. CC sat at the round table in her wheelchair. She struggled to get her German book out of her book bag under her seat. She took the book out and a large Daily Planner.

Ms. Redmon handed each student a test sample. The sample was a multiple choice essay about the United States. It was actually an exercise in test taking. She had each of the students read one essay aloud and give an answer. CC was called on and gave the correct answer. Once again, I realized she read aloud, absorbed the written material and processed the answer quickly. Some of the other students did not do quite as well. One of the boys could not keep his place on the page and the others had trouble reading aloud. CC had learning skills far superior to any of the other students.

Ms. Redmon then asked each student about their Daily Planners and checked their name off a list if they had it with them. They were each given ten points for bringing it to class. CC was the only one who brought it to the teacher. She struggled, wheeled herself up to the teacher's desk and showed her that she had recently purchased a very large planner. The teacher never looked up, checked CC's name off the list, and proceeded to call on the next student.

CC was angry. She told me that she had a lot to say about Ms. Redmon and would tell me later. CC was disgusted and turned to her German assignment. I asked her a few phrases quietly and she answered correctly. I could tell that her anger was interfering with her concentration. CC has a left side weakness and her fine motor skills are problematic. Her daily planner is filled in completely but her printing is very childlike and awkward. She is well aware of her weakness.

I decided to approach Ms. Redmon. She was working on the computer and made me feel very unwelcome. Her facial expressions and whispered comments made me well aware that she did not like CC at all. She explained the point system of grading. She also explained that she was a co-teacher in English for most of the day. The students who were in the English IEP Tutorial all had learning disabilities or truancy problems. She stressed that CC need a lot of help in English and was quite behind in her assignments. I wondered why CC was sitting alone in a corner reading a German book.

Ms. Redmon informed me that the student and their parents decide whether to enroll the student in a regular or special ed class. CC wanted to be in regular classes and she had to keep up. She also stated that the student could opt for a Special Ed grade or a regular grade in their subject matter. She discouraged students from requesting Special Ed grades because it didn't look as well on their transcripts. But she also concluded that many of them chose the Special Ed grade so they could make the honor role. CC had chosen all regular classes so it was up to her *to keep up* with the other students. This was the second time in a day, a staff member made this type of comment.

Ms. Redmon excused herself and started to work on the computer again. I interrupted her and she forcefully stated that she had to update the regular teacher's of her student's progress and that grades were due next week. She told me that she kept in contact with all of CC's teachers by email only.

She also made it clear that she was there to motivate the students to learn independence. I made a remark about CC's parents' comment on her IEP. Ms. Redmon said that everyone felt that CC was too dependent on Mrs. Kreitzmann and that she had to learn to get around on her own more. Mrs. Redmon did not say one positive thing about CC during the entire ten minute conversation. I wanted to say so much but I held myself in check. I did mention the difficulties that I had in getting from class to class in only five minutes. I went and sat back down next to CC. CC was still angry with Ms. Redmon and their mutual animosity was evident.

I decided to observe the other students and let CC study her German. One boy napped in a corner. He was the slow reader who had lost his place so many times. Another girl fidgeted with someone else's books. Ms. Redmon announced to everyone that the girl was failing and that a D would be a gift. She told the student to rewrite an English paper and go to the library to research on the Internet some facts to back up her paper. The student seemed relieved to get out of the room. Another girl was questioned aloud about her assignments. She was also told aloud that she was failing. The girls argued that she had done her papers and they were almost typed. One young man seemed confused as to what he missed and what was due. Ms. Redmon admonished them all as she continued to type. She reminded them that the purpose of their Daily Planner was to keep them on track. This Special Education teacher needs sensitivity training. She had a total disregard for her students' needs or privacy. She very rarely looked at her students and when she did it was only to berate or discipline them.

Mrs. Kreitzmann showed up before the bell and told me that we would have time to talk during CC's next tutorial. The concept of tutorial had completely evaded me. Is it a study hall, is it a tutoring session, is it nap time or is Ms. Redmon a babysitter with discipline problems?

I decided to go to the restroom and I could not find my way. There was no one in the halls during class times. I came upon the girl who had been sent to the library to do research. She had a hall pass and was wandering around the school aimlessly. She personally took me to the bathroom. Both signs on the restrooms had been painted over. Every classroom and hall was white. All classroom numbers were only about two inches big next to the door handle.

Eventually, I found my way back to the classroom. Mrs. Kreitzmann accompanied us to the Math Tutorial. Mrs. Rohr monitored this room. There were only seven students in this class. The boys roamed freely around the room. One turned on the computer, two others sat and played cards, another went to get a drink out of the fridge. She spoke to me and seemed friendly. She allowed the boys to do whatever they wished. I thought to myself tutorial equals playtime. Now I was determined to get some answers.

Mrs. Kreitzmann told me that she used to be CC's part time aide last semester, She has two children who attend the high school. She was formally hired by the school district in January as a tutor. I asked if she was primarily CC's aide or was she obligated to help the other children in the room. She said CC needed her the most so she spent all of her time helping her with math during this hour.

A young girl came in and asked Ms. Kreitzmann to help her with her math assignment. I told her to proceed with the other girl. She refused and said that the young girl was learning disabled but was assigned to be Mrs. Rohr's aide. Mrs. Rohr gave the girl some forms to take to the Office.

I asked Mrs. Kreitzmann about the tutorial sessions. I also asked her what she would like to change about the school and how she could make CC's life better. She could not come up with an answer. She said that she never thought about it before. I believe that Mrs. Kreitzmann is a wonderful, kind and compassionate aide. She is a new hire and found it extremely difficult to criticize the school in any way. Her position is precarious in that she is also a mother as well as an aide. I was well aware that she is insecure in her position but that she has only CC's best interests at heart.

Mrs. Rohr came over to our table and I asked her point blank why CC has lunch and two tutorials in a row. Why three hours of alone time? Mrs. Rohr told me that it was CC's parents and CC who determined that she was under too much stress and this was best for her. I asked why she dropped psychology. Mrs. Rohr stated that it was too difficult for her to keep up with the lectures and note taking. I asked why CC couldn't use a tape recorder in class. Mrs. Kreitzmann said that no one had ever thought of it.

Mrs. Rohr became defensive when I asked her why the boys were allowed to play cards. She told me that they were truant problems and had been sent to her for disciplinary action.

I asked her how she could make CC's life better. She told me that she had tested CC in junior high. CC refused to use an Auto Smart laptop computer. CC and Mrs. Rohr began to debate the pros and cons of the Auto Smart. I stepped in as mediator. I asked what the boy was researching on the computer. He came over and told me he looked up cars and that he was going to be a car salesman at his uncle's dealership. He told me that he didn't need to go to college and that he was going to make lots of money. He was immature and noticeably learning disabled.

Mrs. Rohr told me that the computers were the boy's toys. She usually never bothered them. I asked why the two girls didn't use them. CC spoke up and said, "There's nothing on them that interests girls." Mrs. Rohr agreed. Mrs. Kreitzmann kept quiet. I pushed. I mentioned that CC liked clothes and why couldn't she learn to use the computer to window shop. CC laughed and said, "Didn't know I could do that." I also told her that I had recently found out that my grandfather came from Germany and I found the Ellis Island site. CC started to listen. She told me that she had gone to Ellis Island during the summer and maybe she could find some of her German ancestors on the website.

I pointed out that CC had told me that the laptop had been very cumbersome to carry around and difficult for her to connect to a modem. I did not mention her motor skill difficulty in front of the other students. I suggested that some of the other students in the room might like to help each other learn to use the computer and that maybe a community project could be agreed upon.

Mrs. Rohr ignored my suggestion but Mrs. Kreitzmann said that she would be willing to try it. I was alarmed at how openly critical Mrs. Rohr was of CC. I held my anger in check when I asked Mrs. Rohr what she thought she could do to improve CC's life. Mrs. Rohr could come up with nothing. CC looked at her and said, "You mean that you can think of absolutely nothing that could make my life better?" CC began to cry.

If these tutorials were combined and the two teachers co-taught, these fifteen children would be better served. As it stands, they are relegated to isolation. Mrs. Rohr's students are allowed to do as they please. This is in exact opposition to Mrs. Robert's English tutorial where they are forced into "silent independence." In both cases, it was evident that the teachers interacted with their students to a very limited degree. If the objective is to remove "stress" from the lives of these students, the teachers could consider using these tutorial periods as a pleasurable and rewarding learning experience. The students should be allowed to initiate and combine social activities with learning. The students had different degrees of computer proficiency. There were students in the room who were well equipped to help CC get over her fear of computers. Her awareness of her motor skill deficiency could also be minimized with her peer's assistance.

CC and I went to her regular English class next. Mrs. Edgar was one of her co-teachers. A young girl turned around a desk so CC wheelchair would have a writing surface and CC sat in the area closest to the door. This room was amazing. Hundreds of books and video tapes lined the walls and there were two televisions and a movie screen. An English teacher's dream! The teacher was explaining that courses for senior year would soon have to be determined. After the announcements, the movie, *The Crucible* was turned on for the students to watch. They were informed that they would be tested on this in two days. I asked Mrs. Edgar to talk with me in the hallway.

Mrs. Edgar informed me that CC was failing regular English. I asked why. She told me that CC was too far behind in her assignments. CC's final grade would be failing because of all the school she had missed in the first semester. I asked how CC could be helped. Mrs. Edgar, a regular English teacher said that CC was unwilling to learn to use a computer and that it might help her do her assignments. Her writing was illegible. She felt that CC had a "learned helplessness" about her. I asked her to explain. She felt that sometimes the special needs of frail students like CC could be better met with home schooling.

I asked if Mrs. Edgar would help CC get into the computer class. Mrs. Edgar said that CC would probably not graduate with her class and she could enroll in the computer class next year. That decision would be due by Friday. I realized that all students are pressured into mastering a computer. This creates several problems for those with learning disabilities and motor skill problems.

I asked Mrs. Edgar if she realized that CC might be embarrassed about her motor skills and coordination problems. She did not like CC and made every inference that CC was a burden in her classroom. I told her that CC was on new medication and asked if she was aware that CC had been hospitalized for several weeks. I asked her if she was aware that CC had a GPA of 2.68 and that she was 320/561 in her graduating class. Mrs. Edgar informed me that she had only recently met CC and had been her teacher for about four weeks. I was stunned. This woman was so condescending and confident that she knew CC. I knew more about CC in one day. Yet, she could effectively exclude CC from her classroom by recommending home schooling.

I went back into the classroom. Luckily, CC was watching the movie in the dark. I felt helpless and overwhelmed. I had seen this child sparkle, laugh, angry and cry. I had seen her helpless and strong. I bent down and kissed her cheek in the dark. I told her that I had to meet Mrs. Pearson and we exchanged phone numbers. I took off my musical lapel pin. I pinned it on her shirt and told her, "I honor you with this award for being my angel."

CC's day would soon be over after the movie. Mine was not. I went to Mrs. Pearson's office and told her everything that went on throughout the day. I quoted CC's teachers and expressed my concerns. I told her about the incident at Macomb and that CC wanted to be a teacher not a missionary. I told her about the speech teacher's arrogance, Mrs. Kreitzmann's patience and kindness, and the open hostility I had encountered that day.

I asked about Mrs. Kreitzmann's formal position with the school. Mrs. Pearson made it clear that Mrs. Kreitzmann was CC's aide. I questioned as to why Mrs. Kreitzmann was only with her during one tutorial. I wanted a good definition of a tutorial. I told her about the computer disagreement between CC and Mrs. Rohr.

Mrs. Pearson laughed and said, "How ironic! Mrs. Rohr won't touch a computer. She's quite old-fashioned and afraid of them."

Mrs. Pearson defended Mrs. Robert's and Mrs. Edgar's viewpoint that CC needed to become independent. She told me that CC is arrogant much of the time and that she has difficulty accepting criticism from authority figures,

Mrs. Pearson asked me if I would be able to adequately write an objective paper about CC. We talked for two hours about the difficulty that schools face in adhering to strict federal guidelines and district goals. Mrs. Pearson takes her job very seriously and is a compassionate and objective staff person. After several conversations with her, I could in no way judge her or her opinions about what is best for CC. CC and her parents make all the final decisions about CC's curriculum and after school activities. Mrs. Pearson makes sure that whatever class CC chooses, she will be allowed to enroll in that class. She also makes a point of tracking CC's progress in after school activities. Mrs. Pearson is sensitive to CC's academic needs and well aware of CC's problems with socialization and isolation.

How effective is this school's mainstreaming program? I know that there are 150 special needs students in this school. They are all allowed to choose their curriculum. The deaf and autistic children have regular classes as well as specialized assistance. The students with learning disabilities are placed in regular classes and are required to attend Tutorials in certain subjects. These Tutorials are totally ineffective. The teachers seem very aware of the student's labels but very negligent in providing these students with the support and education specifically designed for their needs. Mrs. Redmon ignored CC and Mrs. Rohr openly argued with her. CC's regular teachers, Mr. Harris and Ms. Taylor treated her with indifference and Mrs. Edgar clearly believed that CC did not belong in regular education classes.

I observed how the other students ignored her and many seemed afraid of her. In the halls, most of the students didn't even move aside for her wheelchair. A few students made sure that she was situated and had a desk but she was on her own for most of the day. CC can be so funny and happy yet her unhappiness was evident. Many people treat her as if she were invisible.

I decided to interview her father. CC's father told me that he and his wife have had to force the school system to include CC in regular classrooms. He has been President of the Michigan Spina Bifida Foundation for many years. He and his wife have held offices in several organizations for children with disabilities. He felt that it would be necessary for CC to stay in high school another year. He didn't think that she could successfully take care of her physical needs and go to college. He was aware of every problem I had encountered with CC's teachers. He specifically admitted that the school would never deny CC anything because of who he was. He would never allow it. As her advocate, he would challenge any teacher or professional. He was truthful about CC's deficiencies as well as her skills. He seemed to be an amazing, loving and caring father. He explained "learned helplessness" to me. CC usually attracted help because it was easier than doing the task herself. He admitted that many times his wife dressed CC because it was faster than allowing CC to do it herself. He has researched not only her disease but also every imaginable avenue open to her. I felt that CC was in good hands. His opinion of the school was mixed. He realized the teachers' limitations but also felt they did have CC's best interest at heart. His battle with the school system never ended. His expectations were realistic yet high. He was extremely concerned about CC's stress level. He expressed his concerns about CC's new medication and the affect it had on her moods and temperament. He admitted that CC verbally challenged her teachers a lot. This could account for their critical attitudes toward her.

We discussed her IQ. The WISC III scores were verbal IQ-87, performance-58, full scale IQ-70. Her achievement scores were reading-90, math-86, written 99. I asked if he thought her test scores were accurate. He agreed with Mrs. Pearson and felt that her IQ was over 80. He believed the test was biased

and poorly administered. He also told me that he paid for private tutors to come to the home and help CC with her homework. He had hoped it would relieve her anxiety about doing homework.

CC has had various psychological tests. He agreed with the psychologist's view that CC has problems connecting cause and effect, difficulty developing relationships, and unrealistic goals. CC will always have to be dependent on someone for her physical needs. Emotionally, she has to deal with a lot of anger. Socially, she goes out every night and joins many programs. Given her physical limitations, this seems remarkable.

CC participates in a number of outside activities. She has been involved in the Wheelchair National Championships and International Swim Meets. He also stated that among the disabled there is a hierarchy and tremendous discrimination. CC is discriminated against because she has a wheelchair when she participates in special needs events. Yet, because she seems bright and intelligent, she is certain that she is better off than those students with severe cognitive and learning disabilities who do not have physical challenges.

He has approached Ferris State College and Central University as options for CC. He is adamant that she is not ready to live on her own. He will allow her to go away to college when her independence is a certainty.

After my interview with CC's father, I asked myself the same question I had asked her teachers. How could I effectively make CC's life better. Academically, every subject and every class is open to her. Her teacher's track her progress on paper but never speak to her. The lines of communication need improvement. The school psychologist and counselors are aware of CC's social and emotional problems but they have not been able to effectively help her. Her feelings of isolation are ironic given the fact that she belongs to so many groups. I also feel that some of her loneliness can be attributed to being a teenager and not being disabled. If she had more social contact with young women like she did in speech class, she might realize that so-called normal girls have insecurities too.

Academically, CC can achieve almost anything she desires. It might take her longer than most but she needs support. There is a big difference between needing support and learned helplessness. Her parents and teachers need to understand that. She goes out every night of the week. This would create a problem for any teenager. There is not sufficient time for her to do her homework or catch up on her studies. CC needs to learn how to effectively use her time and balance social activities with academic requirements.

Inclusive Education stresses that the teacher's method of instruction accommodate all types of learners. The teachers I observed never accommodated CC. Some resented her others only tolerated her. Their tone of voice, body language, lack of eye contact and dismissive attitudes segregate CC in regular classroom settings. But more importantly counselors, psychologists and parents need to find methods of support that accommodate all kinds of personalities. In order to relieve her stress, they isolate her for three class periods. It would be better to engage her in social activities facilitated by teachers during those Tutorials. Her regular teachers feel that if she wants to be in regular classes, she must adjust to their demands. The relationship between the school and the parents is intensive and they are constantly in communication with each other. It seems to have created some of the tension I felt between CC and her regular teachers. Inclusive Education is a process that should not only be indicated by how well a student blends into his academic surroundings but also by how well he maintains his/her identity. So how is it that CC is still invisible? Her parents and teachers have spoken to her about her academic goals but have they ever listened to her dreams?

Simmons High School has all the necessary elements to physically include special need students. Other than the fact, that the classrooms and offices are not clearly designated, this school is designed to accommodate all special needs and is barrier free. Some of the classrooms could be better utilized and the Desks could be re-arranged so that CC wouldn't always be relegated to the back of the room. The staff tracks her academic progress weekly. Her regular and Special Ed teachers discuss her progress regularly. The school counselor and psychologist are aware of her problems with socialization. Her parents communicate with the school on an almost daily basis. Her parents have had to fight to have her included in general education classes. This could account for the animosity I encountered. Her aide sits alone with her in the back of the room and further establishes the differences between her and the other students. This aide could establish a rapport with all the children. She is kind and thoughtful and would be very good at it.

One could surmise that they all work for a common goal. But in no way did I ever feel that a sense of community is being built around CC. She needs to feel safe, secure and cared for. Her medical problems seem almost insurmountable, yet she can still joke about them. She needs to feel that she is an active member of this community. She could be taught to assert her opinions without being confrontational. Understandably authority school figures have fueled her anger. Positive approaches to facilitate learning are a challenge to her teachers. So often, I only heard them speak in the negative. Support and positive reinforcement could only enrich her learning experience in high school. She cried when she spoke of not

graduating with her class and being held back for another year. This has created emotional turmoil for her. And everyone needs to help her understand exactly how this can be beneficial.

Everyone's goal is that CC becomes independent. She is insecure and emotionally unprepared for the outside world. I am certain that there are hundreds in this school of 1750 that also could be described as immature. Awareness and attitude adjustments by her peers could make her life easier. Staff could facilitate this in a number of ways. The school promotes tolerance and diversity. These programs need to include students with disabilities. Shared group success is pronounced everywhere you look at Simmons. They are very proud of their Blue Ribbon designation. All of the tools are available. A serious commitment on the part of staff and parents is necessary to attain an Inclusive Blue Ribbon Community.