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Grade 12

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Driven By Joy

In seventh grade, I met a student in my choir class that ultimately changed my life. He had down syndrome. I quickly recognized his joy, positivity, and the genuine love he had for others. In hopes of learning more about special education, I got involved in his class, which serves students who are deaf, hard of hearing, and have multiple disabilities. I was intrigued by the various methods in which the teacher executed individualized learning in the classroom. The students, which each had different disabilities, were very receptive and engaged in their learning environment. This inspired me to continue to learn more about special education.

I remained involved in this program throughout high school. In my freshman and sophomore years, I served as a student aide. Currently, as well as in my junior year, I serve as a student intern. In addition to working with the students, I prepare interactive lesson plans, activities, and materials that the students can utilize in the classroom. I am also actively learning American Sign Language. Through my experiences in this program, I have built relationships with many students. I have observed each of the students mature personally and academically over the years. What inspires me the most about this program is that the students learn how to be a child and simply enjoy life despite their disabilities.

While there are various platforms that the students learn from, the learning of life and social skills is the focus in the classroom. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the students frequently participated in interactive field trips to the zoo, grocery stores, restaurants, etc. Through visiting various places throughout their community, the students learn how to utilize social skills in their everyday lives. In addition to these interactive experiences, we have holiday parties in which the students interact with their peers, utilize table manners, and assist in decorating their classroom. The students enjoy learning by participating in these activities.

There was a student who joined this program during my freshman year. He did not know how to communicate. Due to this, he communicated through being angry, hitting, throwing objects, and eating off the floor. Now, the student utilizes basic ASL and smiles to communicate. He uses eating utensils, blows kisses, laughs, and wants to be involved with the other students. I cannot fully describe how incredible his behavioral transformation was - all because he simply desired to communicate. Students like him are what inspires me to pursue special education as a career.

Children with special needs are a gift from God. They teach others what is truly important in life. While school and other childhood commitments are important, a child should not lose sight of the importance of simply being a kid and enjoying life. I began this journey six years ago when I met a student in my choir class. The joy that I witness everyday is what drives me to pursue special education as a career.