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TE 803  
Case Study

## **Teaching Selected Students Better**

The class I am focusing on is my fourth hour, eleventh grade World History class. It is a small class with just nineteen students. Normal classes at Athens consist of thirty students. The small number of students creates a more intimate learning environment, which has really allowed me to get to know the students and their various learning styles and abilities. The class consists of mostly white students, with a couple Indian and Asian students. The school lies in an affluent suburban city. One major aspect that is unique to this class is that it takes place right after lunch. Some kids are hyper, some are tired, some are late, etc.

The unit I am using is one on Ancient Greece. There are a variety of activities involved in this unit, including lectures, maps, and a research project. I tried to use a variety of teaching methods as a means to reach students on varying ability levels. Most of the activities could easily be modified to fit both a higher achieving and lower achieving student.

My first student is a Special Education student. I was told she is classified as Learning Disabled with difficulty in reading comprehension. She requires some accommodations, especially on tests. For other assignments, if she is struggling, she lets me know and I help out wherever I can, whether it's giving her a print out of the notes or just explaining the directions more clearly. I can tell she is a very motivated student. She tries hard on everything she does and she does quality work.

My interaction with this student is very pleasant. She is a very sweet girl who seems to always be in a fairly good mood. I have never seen her mad, angry, or upset. In fact, I do not think I have ever seen her in a bad mood. Whenever I see her in the hall she smiles and says hello. I can tell she really wants to do well and I always try to encourage her. Whenever I see that she has done well on something, I am sure to tell her. I think she needs that kind of positive reinforcement because I think there could be a small sense of self-doubt because of her disability. I chose her for this project for all these reasons. I wanted to look at a student who wants to succeed, but has to take some extra steps based on her learning disability.

My second student has been described to me as a great kid with great grades. I was told she is a high achiever and very well behaved. What I have seen with her is a much higher ability level than other students. She can finish her work quickly, but she does a more thorough job than many other students. She goes above and beyond the requirements on just about every assignment. If I ask the students to list five facts about a particular ancient ruler, she will list eight. If I ask for a two-sentence description of an empire, she will give me three or four sentences. One thing she can improve on though, is her participation. She is very quiet and does not participate much in class discussions unless I specifically call on her.

My interaction with the second student is also always pleasant. She, too, is very warm-hearted and kind. I rarely ever see her in a bad mood either. I chose her for this project because of her well-mannered demeanor and her excellent ability. I wanted to look at students from various locations on the spectrum of learning. Student #2 requires

more of a challenge than other students. The basic, middle-level work that the class normally does is simply too easy for her.

In order to teach student #1 better, I planned a variety of accommodations. First of all, with the research project, I tried to put her with a group of students who would work well together, using their varying ability levels. I did not want her to be in a group of all low-achieving students for fear that they would “bring her down.” I also did not want her to be in a group of high-achieving students who might look down upon her lesser abilities or leave her behind entirely. I put her with students who would help each other create the best project they could. This seemed to work because their project was a quality one.

Our tests usually consist of a matching section with about twenty-five or more vocabulary terms given in a word bank with twenty-five matching definitions. To accommodate the abilities of the first student, I cluster the words in groups of five. She, therefore, only has to match five words with five definitions instead of all twenty-five at once. If there is a multiple-choice section, I will sometimes eliminate some of the answers so instead of choosing the best answer out of four or five given, she only has to choose from two or three. Also, on test days, she goes to the Media Center where there are Integration Consultants and others who work with Special Education students. The environment in the Media Center is better for her concentration, plus she can receive one-on-one attention from the consultants.

In order to teach student #2 better, I tried to ask her more challenging questions during class discussions. I want to engage her in higher-level thinking. I know other students in the class are not necessarily capable of this, so that is why I direct the more

difficult questions toward her. Just like with student #1, I tried to put student #2 in a particular group for the research project. Again, I wanted her to be in a group of students who would not “bring her down.” I did want, however, for her to be in a group where she could possibly work on her leadership skills. At parent-teacher conferences, her parents told me that they were concerned about her abilities as a leader and whether or not she was very outspoken in the classroom. The truth is, she is not very outspoken in a large group setting, but I wanted to see how she would act in a small group. She was grouped with two students who are of average ability. I thought that maybe with her higher ability, she might help motivate them to come up to her level. I knew these were two softer-spoken students who might give her (student #2) the opportunity to shine as the group’s leader. It seemed to have worked. Their project turned out great and they all wrote in their evaluations about how much they enjoyed working together.

The risk I took with this situation was if these average-ability students would bring down student #2 instead of her bringing them up. It would not have been fair for her if this were the case. Trying to strategically place students into groups can be risky in any class for any project. It is hard to do this because what my thoughts about a student’s ability might be incorrect or just a stereotype. There is no way to know for sure how well a particular accommodation will turn out with any student. Every student is different.

I believe I succeeded at teaching these selected students “better.” In the case of student #1, I have noticed her continued motivation to be successful. Throughout each unit, she still strives to do her best and learn the material to the best of her abilities. I have also continued to use the accommodated tests for her. She has stopped going to the Media Center for assistance on her tests and instead takes them with the rest of the class.

She seems to be doing well in this environment and I am impressed by her desire to be doing things more individually, without the assistance of a special education teacher.

Student #2 continues to succeed in my class. I continue to try to challenge her to the best of my ability. My fear with a student like this has always been that he or she will be bored and un-motivated. She has continued to be motivated and has started participating on her own more frequently. I think it is probably easier for her to just volunteer answers rather than having me call on her randomly. I still wonder, however, if she would be better suited in an Advanced Placement class. Despite my efforts to challenge her, I still worry that this “regular classroom” environment is not one that is suited for her.