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The cooperating teacher at my current placement is part of a team of two who are assisted by three paraprofessionals. One thing I noticed by my second day at the placement was that the special education teacher is the only one who leads lessons throughout the day. At first I thought perhaps they traded off days where one was more heavily instructing than the other but then I noted that the rare occasions the special educator asked the general education teacher to take over a lesson because she would like to continue formally assessing students phonics levels or she is managing a tantrum, the general education teacher seems unsure of what her teaching point is for the lesson.

I inquired as to their planning technique and how they divide the workload and was not surprised that the special education teacher said she does everything alone because she was “anal about the way things needed to run.” She disclosed that she gets frustrated when the class does not flow the way she expects and has forced her co-teacher into a teaching assistant like role over the years (they have been working together for 6 years). However, working in a co-teacher dynamic it is evident that when the class goes awry or the special educator needs that support from another teacher she gets frustrated by the other teachers diminished role. In essence she has taken on the role of two teachers in every aspect of the classroom. The children do not view the general education teacher as the same power figure and she struggles to manage their behaviors daily because the only time she is in front of the class is during morning meeting. The special educator becomes frustrated by how long morning meeting or read aloud runs because of the constant stopping the general educator must does in order to regain order and the attention of the students. When the special educator speaks, the class listens. When the general educator speaks, without an echo from the special educator she may as well be silent because the students do not mind her.

In terms of the special educators lessons, they are relevant and certainly at the classes level. The children follow along well during the mini lesson and are for the most part are very engaged. Her tone while she is leading lessons differs from her typical tone and the children seem excited and interested. She models every expectation for the children and does a share of at least two children’s work at the end of individual/small group work time in every lesson. Once the students are sent to their tables for small group or independent work (4 small groups of 4-7 students each) the teacher returns to her desk and seems relatively disconnected from the class. The three paraprofessionals are stationed at a table each and the general educator at the remaining table. The special educator does not directly interact with any of the groups but from her desk shouts out the occasional behavioral reminder or warning for students. Seeing how she is the sole planner in the classroom her lack of involvement in the implementation aspect is concerning because she is not directly assessing the students retention of the material. Perhaps the lesson would need to be revisited because many of the students do not get it. Instead the paraprofessionals and general educator sit with the students to manage other directed behavior and help the students to the best of their ability. On numerous occasions certain children did not complete their assignments and were then required to sit in during their recess time until they completed it relatively unassisted. This was bothersome because the children are typically IEP students and hold over students who were given what appeared to be unrealistic expectations given their performance levels. On other occasions students were moved on the “traffic light” from green to red because they did not complete their work. This system is flawed because the students are being reprimanded and punished for their disabilities in the long run. The work was not modified to help them reach their full potential, perhaps because the teacher is taking on the role of two adults.

In this class there is a disconnect in the management of behavior and the teachers attention distribution. The students with known behavior difficulties are constantly addressed and praised while the students who are always “on green” just fly under the radar seemingly invisible to the staff. The students are on a check system for when they are doing what is expected of them. However the general education teacher frequently mentions “removing checks” which I found to be an issue with the reward system. Students are frequently given time outs, which I disagree with in general, but the timeouts are also issued so far delayed from the actions that the students do not even understand why they are being removed from an activity. I found that the students are regularly called out on inappropriate behavior throughout lessons but hardly if ever recognized for doing what is expected. At the end of the week two students received prizes for reaching the goal in checks and I was informed that it is typically the same group who receive prizes. One student with no language and significant delays has a paraprofessional who does not agree with the teacher’s intervention methods (a visuals board and timer reward system) and the teacher is constantly stepping in because the paraprofessional has developed a physical contact approach with the student. The child is not receiving consistent behavior intervention and for a student with already prevalent delays this disparity is hindering his overall development. This disconnect prompted me to inquire about staff meetings because the staff does not appear to be on the same page in many regards. The teacher said that the staff does not meet regularly and some of the paraprofessionals and herself included have not read the IEP’s of the students they work with. Overall this classroom is teaching me a lot of the “don’ts” regarding my future classroom and being able to step back and analyze the situation from an outsiders point of view has allowed me to see how disjointed of a classroom environment has been created and ultimately how this is only harming the instruction and development of the students in this classroom. The teacher has the best intentions but without the support of her staff, to some degree because she does not allow for them to take on roles that would support her as a professional, she is hardly staying afloat in the classroom.