Exploring Teacher-Student Relationships in Special Education

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Special education is a complicated field, and the forces that shape its existence and practices frequently go undiscussed. As someone considering teaching special education, I became curious about the social forces that affect teachers who work in the field. I decided to explore these dynamics by observing and interviewing special education teachers to learn more about how they relate to their students and what, if anything, impacts those relationships. Through this research, I am seeking to investigate how social forces affect special education teachers in their relationships with students and how power, privilege, and identity influence student-teacher relationships in special education. The goal of this research is to contribute to the body of literature that helps teachers to situate themselves within power relationships and serves to inform their teaching so they can better serve all students.

For this research, I used a mixture of ethnographic and interview data. I spent 20 hours per week in a classroom setting at the summer program of a private, self-contained school, located in a large city, for students with a variety of developmental disabilities, including autism. During my time at the school, I acted as a participant-observer, taking field notes on interactions that I observed between teachers and their students, as well as working directly with the students as a volunteer. The summer program splits the students into lowerclassmen (rising 9th and 10th graders) and upperclassmen (rising 11th and 12th graders). They also divide the students into three cohorts within their class level. Cohort placement is based on the level of student independence. The students take cT/FTm-9(e)4(rs)-(7a)4(nd)]TTEQ0.00000912 0 6 2 9 2 re

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