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 My views on special education have definitely changed. I was homeschooled from 1st grade through 12th grade. I did not come in contact with special education in a school setting. When I went to my observation at Mandan High School, that experience was the first time I had seen what special education was like. Prior to this, I generally came in contact with school age children with disabilities in my homeschooling group. Their parents knew the best way to teach them and took it seriously. Until I took this course, I did not fully realize how much general education teachers have to incorporate into their classrooms. I had heard from my sister that with more students with disabilities staying in the classroom, it will become somewhat of a challenge for general education teachers. I did not know that general education teachers were expected to teach without being specialists themselves. I initially thought that those who qualified for special education were all sent to special schools with those exceptions who could not afford it. I came to realize gradually that special education was not a separate school. It consists of differentiating instruction in a general education classroom and a class period in a special education classroom in the same school. Special education is also designed not only to help students academically, but also to teach them life skills. This second one was something that I did not know schools had to teach their students. I thought that special education was only for teaching academics.

 I learned that in order to qualify for special education, the student needs to go through a lot of tests and paperwork. I did not know that there were so many steps in the process to put a student into an optimal learning environment. That optimal learning environment includes the general education setting.

Throughout this semester, I learned different strategies to use in my classroom when I teach in the general education setting. I can be a “change agent” in removing the barriers in classrooms for individuals with disabilities. As a general education teacher, I can do this is several ways. One way is to make sure that the facilities and supplies are accessible for students with disabilities. I can actively make sure that there are supplies and equipment available to aid in the education of my students. Another way is to create a welcoming and caring environment. In order to do this, I will make an effort to develop a relationship with my students. An additional way is to help my students learn optimally in the classroom. I can achieve this through cooperating with my special education teachers. I can provide differentiated instruction for my students through the information given me. A final way is to actively involve the parents of my students in my students’ education. Asking them to volunteer at school activities, inviting them to meetings, and cultivating a relationship with them will encourage their involvement. Through cultivating a relationship with them, I will be better able to help my students learn. Getting their input on their child’s way of learning is invaluable since they know their child the best.