

Case Study

Megan and Mr. Snyder

John Snyder is starting his second year of teaching as a special education teacher. He is excited and very eager to work with middle school students with mild/moderate disabilities. He sees these years as the “bridge to adulthood” and wants to keep the students engaged in learning and help create the lifelong learner that the school’s mission statement addresses. Before the beginning of the school year, Mr. Snyder reviewed the Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) of the 12 students on his caseload and makes a chart of all the accommodations and modifications he will need to put in place in the general education classroom. The students on his caseload have a variety of disabilities and include specific learning disabilities, emotional/behavioral disabilities, autism, and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

The students on Mr. Snyder’s caseload have different accommodations and modifications for their middle school classes. Ten students require calculators for their math classes and five students should receive a reduced number of problems on homework assignments. Seven students, in order to help them with their organizational skills, should have their daily agenda book monitored. The agenda book is also used to communicate with parents about the students’ academic and behavioral progress. Another accommodation for three students is preferential seating (proximity to instructor). Two students have “Crisis Passes” as part of their Behavior Intervention Plan; this pass allows the students to leave their classes when they are frustrated or overwhelmed and go to the school psychologist or their counselor.

Mr. Snyder will be working with Ms. Saunders, the general education math teacher, during the school year. Mr. Snyder and Ms. Saunders meet to review the course guide and curriculum scope and sequence. Mr. Snyder shares the students’ accommodations and provides suggestions about how to integrate the accommodations with the scope and sequence of the mathematics curriculum. After their meeting, Mr. Snyder believes he can assist his students in accessing the mathematics curriculum.

On the first day of school, Mr. Snyder is ready with name cards on the students’ desks and a game to help the teachers and the students learn the names of all of the students. The “Ice Breaker” game is similar to “I’m going on a trip.” Students state their name and identify a personal/meaningful object that starts with same letter as their first name (e.g., Ben selects ball because it begins with a B and he plays baseball). The students will then take turns repeating

students' names and the items the students selected. Mr. Snyder is ready with a preprinted list of names to hand out to students so they can write down the items next to the students' names.

Megan enters the classroom announcing, "I get to leave whenever this class is stupid! I have a crisis pass from last year and it is still good!" Mr. Snyder is taken aback. He looks at the general education teacher; she shrugs her shoulders and tells him he is in charge. Mr. Snyder introduces himself to Megan and asks if he can help her find her desk. Megan replies, "No, I'm good. I've been able to read my own name since I was 4." Mr. Snyder smiles and nods, then he walks away to greet other students. As the bell rings, Mr. Snyder notices Megan is still wandering around the classroom. He does not want to agitate her so he makes a blanket statement that he is glad the students were able to recognize their names were in alphabetical order, hoping Megan will pick up on his cue and find her seat. He introduces himself and Ms. Saunders while watching Megan meander through the rows. She shuffles past students allowing her backpack to brush up against them or their desks.

Finally, Mr. Snyder tells Megan where her seat is located. Megan makes an exaggerated sigh and mumbles something under her breath. Mr. Snyder introduces the "Ice Breaker" and the class spends some time introducing themselves and stating their objects. During the game, as the students practice each other's first names, Megan stands up and says, "This is what I meant by stupid. We have all known each other since 3rd grade, so we obviously already know everybody's name!" Mr. Snyder ignored Megan's blurting out because the school psychologist advised that if he acknowledged the behavior, it would continue for the duration of the school year. However, if he ignored the behavior, it would stop by the end of the first week of school.

After the "Ice Breaker," Ms. Saunders and Mr. Snyder begin the mathematics lesson. As Ms. Saunders gives the instructions, Mr. Snyder passes out the worksheets. He is careful to provide the correct handouts to the students so that students with accommodations receive the appropriate handout without attention drawn to the different sheets. In his zeal to accommodate each student, Mr. Snyder left the instructions off the paper. Ms. Saunders points this out to him, so Mr. Snyder goes to the board and begins to write the instructions and gives them verbally to the students. During this lag during in the instruction, Megan begins to hum. One student, Mike, asks her to stop, which annoys her and she begins to hum louder. Mr. Snyder stops writing the directions on the board and walks to Mike's desk feeling if he can control Mike he will gain control of the class. Because of the disruption, Mr. Snyder does not fully give the instructions

and decides it isn't necessary after looking at the paper. Mr. Snyder believes his instructions were clear enough that anyone paying attention would know how to complete the worksheet.

After a few minutes of letting the students complete the worksheet, Mr. Snyder calls students up to the board to fill in answers and complete the problems from the worksheet. As each student completes the assigned problems on the board, he says, "Alright," and then calls on the next student. If a student is incorrect, he encourages them to try again or invites them to call on a friend help. When it is Megan's turn, she elects to "pass." Mr. Snyder tells her that passing on a turn is not an option and she needs to try. Megan becomes emphatic that she is allowed to pass whenever she wants and yells that his way of teaching is stupid. Again taking the advice of the school psychologist, Mr. Snyder ignores Megan and calls on Mike. Mike decides to pass as well. Mr. Snyder tells him that he must try, but Mike replies that he does not have to take a turn because Megan did not have to take a turn and he believes what is fair for one is fair for all.

Mr. Snyder is quickly becoming frustrated and Ms. Saunders steps in to continue the lesson. Students finish their responses and Ms. Saunders tells the students they will be completing a pretest that covers the mathematical concepts from the previous year. She states that it is important for the teachers to understand what the students know so they can plan for the year. Mr. Snyder joins in the explanation of their teaching philosophy and dialogue develops between Ms. Saunders and Mr. Snyder, while the students sit and passively listen. Megan interrupts and asks the teachers if they are done talking. Mr. Snyder turns to Megan and explains that it is important for the students to understand the lesson, the pretest, and what the teachers are planning for the year. Megan tells him it isn't important that the students understand and that he is being stupid and she holds up her crisis pass and walks out of class.

The bell rings, and as the students leave the classroom, they turn in their pretest as an exit ticket. Mr. Snyder looks over the pretests and sees, that even with his accommodations, only four students attempted all of the problems. Six students completed half of the pretest. The remaining two students on his caseload, Megan and the student with ADHD did not attempt any of the problems; all of their answers were left blank. Mr. Snyder shakes his head and throws away the blank pretests.