People always tell me that it takes a special person to teach special education. I must admit that I don’t feel special, instead I feel blessed. I always wanted to be a teacher and for almost 18 years I loved it, loved teaching children in grades K-5. Then, in January of 2015, my professional life changed. I moved from teaching kindergarten to a PreK Structured Teaching class for children ages 3-5 with autism. Not only did I love teaching these sweet children, but I quickly became passionate about it!

I learned quite a lot about myself during those first few years. I had always felt that success in the classroom was determined by the effectiveness of the teacher and her ability to reach every student in the class. While I still believe this partially true, I now believe success in the classroom is determined by the effectiveness of the teacher and her ability to know HOW to reach every student. If the knowledge of ‘how’ is not there it is the responsibility of the teacher to do whatever is necessary to gain that knowledge. I was not prepared to teach children with autism as I knew very little about it. My students came to school eager to learn and it was my duty to teach them in the way that they would learn and be successful. It took me over a year to realize I was hindering my students in their search for knowledge. I must admit, this wasn’t something that made me feel proud or very good about myself. In order to correct this I applied for and was accepted into the Graduate Certificate program at the University of Kansas and earned my Graduate Certificate in Autism Spectrum Disorders in May 2017. I then applied to their master’s program and earned my Master’s in Special Education with an emphasis in Autism in December 2018. My students deserve to have the best I can offer, so it was necessary for me to return to school. I am now confident that I know what I need to do in order to reach each of them.

Another lesson I learned from my students was that each of them had something inside of themselves that gives them the ability to learn and grow. In the beginning it may not have been easy or probably done correctly on my part, yet I still saw my students make progress and grow throughout the year. I’ve always believed that every child could learn, but these children have taught me that they play an important part in that learning. They want to learn and strive to figure out their environment. I could go on and on about how much I have learned in the 4 years I’ve taught these wonderful students, but I’ll stop here and update my philosophy.

Following my graduation for my MSE in Special Education, I applied for admission to the doctorate program at Liberty University in Special Education and continue on that path today. I moved to a position as an Autism Support Teacher in a middle school and continue to learn from my students. I enjoy working with them daily and working to support them in their inclusive classroom settings. While it has been a rewarding experience, I see areas where I can hopefully make a difference not only in my school, but in other schools in the future.

As a past general education teacher, I know what is expected of teachers and how much emphasis can be placed on scores and constant assessments, which can seem overwhelming when a teacher is unsure how to keep up with it all. I see teachers who are willing to learn how to include students with special needs, but they worry it is going to be more work than they are able to handle. I work with the teachers in my school and while there has been progress, I want to see more occur. Teachers are eager to teach their students and want to do what is right; however, without knowledge and support they often feel they cannot accomplish what is needed. I can model the ways this can be done and not only will students with needs be successful, but all students will benefit! I can support them and encourage them, offer help when needed, and lead schools to be leaders in inclusive settings. Every student deserves to learn along with their peers, and this can be accomplished when teachers know how to modify and make accommodations that meet the needs of all students.

I believe every child can learn, though it may be at different paces and through various means. I believe that students want to learn and grow and will work hard to do so. Teachers owe them the same determination in their teaching and need to continue to learn and grow as professionals. Finally, I believe I’m definitely blessed to be teaching in the field of special education with students diagnosed with autism and though I am passionate in giving my students all that I have to give them, I believe that I can offer more for all students by working with teachers. My philosophy goes beyond my own classroom as I believe providing the right support and assistance to all teachers will benefit the population of students with special needs as a whole.