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## Disability awareness : creating a better tomorrow

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Disability Awareness: Creating a Better Tomorrow

Disability Awareness: Creating a Better Tomorrow

Marlina Massagli

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## Disability Awareness: Creating a Better Tomorrow

### **“Setting the Stage”**

Many children today are being bullied based on a disability they may have. It may be a learning disability or a physical disability. This may seem hard to believe; shockingly enough children with disabilities are becoming the targets of bullies. We need to acknowledge that collectively changes need to be made so students with disabilities are no longer bullied.

Unfortunately, I have been a witness to a situation where a child with a disability had been bullied. It happened when I was substituting as an Aid for a fifth grade classroom. For a little over a year I had not witnessed any acts of bullying against a child with a disability. My substituting position was as a special education aid. By being the aid inside the classroom I was in charge of watching over one boy. This child had Autism but was high functioning his name was Jason.

Jason one of the sweetest most sincere kids you would ever meet. This most recent fall of 2013 was his first year being mainstreamed into a regular education classroom. Jason strived to do his best everyday to follow along in class and show his peers and teacher respect. With only being mainstreamed now for less than a year he was doing better than ever. Despite Daniel having Autism, his peers quickly judged him and labeled him as different along with weird. Most likely this is because these children are not aware that some children may have a physical or mental disability. All Jason wanted to be was accepted into the classroom not labeled.

Now viewed as different, this created a whole string of problems. Many children with Autism may have outburst in class that they do not have control of.

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Due to the fact many of the students in the classroom had no idea Jason had Autism they thought that he had random freak-outs in class. Some of the incidents included him yelling at the top of his lungs, throwing or ripping up his paper, or not letting the teacher move on in her lesson plan, because he insisted she was wrong.

Finally, Jason had one incident when I was across the classroom. It was pretty minor; he just took out his frustration on a paper by scribbling all over it with force. I quickly wanted to make it back over to Jason so I could make sure he got back on track. When making my way back over the girl sitting across from him had her back to me not being able to see me walk over because her back was turned she whispered, "You're a freak! You should be in special ED." At this point my heart was crushed. This little girl I know was trying to mean but the words she spoke truly hit Jason heart like a dagger. Little did she know that he was in a special education classroom the year before.

You can only imagine the pressure that put on me to address what the girl had said. I had to ask her to stay in at recess to address her comment she said to Jason. She apologized to Jason, the teacher, and myself. I am not saying by talking to her or making her apologize fixed the problem for Jason. It certainly put Jason at ease though.

There are teachers who make differences throw ought your life. From making learning fun, to being a person you can trust to ask for help, we occasionally have teachers like this. They may be rare but when you have a teacher like this it's someone you will not forget. Well it happens to be that one of these teachers for me is Jason's teacher Ms. Miller. Ms. Miller takes the time for children if they have any

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difficulties and promotes a respectful environment in and outside the classroom. She also provides an afterschool program to teach children how to sew. She made the program free by raising money to cover all cost by generous monetary donations. If you don't think that enough she offers free tutoring before and after school on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Students who I have gotten to know over the past two years respected her as a teacher, and followed the expectations she had set for her children in the classroom. The children knew there would be consequences if they did not uphold the classroom rules and respect level.

If a scenario like Jason's can happen in the classrooms or at school, with a teacher who is such a positive role model then we need to take action. If we could cut down the incidents we could make the world of difference for children with disabilities. This situation with Daniel may have been a rare incident, but what if we could cut these bullying situations significantly down? By creating the opportunity to inform children that others learn differently, we can enlighten children creating an understanding and acceptance of everyone's differences.

### **What is being done in the classroom so children with disabilities feel excepted?**

*Autism fact sheet* . (2013, December 30). Retrieved from [http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/autism/detail\\_autism.htm](http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/autism/detail_autism.htm)

This cite was put out by the government and the Office of Communications, Public Liaison National Institute of Neurological Disorders, and the Stroke National Institutes of Health. The website targets people who want to know general information about Autism. This article was very

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helpful to me because it went into detail about how Autism is treated and specialized in places, one important place being inside the school setting. From this article I learned that schools are trying to specifically help children with Autism, improve social skills. This directly relates to the article when they state, "Educational/behavioral interventions: Therapists use highly structured and intensive skill-oriented training sessions to help children develop social and language skills, such as Applied Behavioral Analysis." ("Autism fact sheet," 2013). Behavioral problems are directly linked to children with Autism. This must create a direct problem inside the classroom.

Dybvik, A. (2004). Autism and the inclusion mandate. *Education Next*, 4(1), Retrieved from <http://educationnext.org/autismandtheinclusionmandate/>

Autism has been a struggle for many children. This article opens up with a certain child Daniel and the struggles he faced when he was in school. Daniel was a mainstreamed child and explains how he stuck out like a sore thumb. The social aspect enhanced with events in the day to do schedule can really affect a child. "Events change and the day does not correspond to his schedule, Daniel may lose control and throw a tantrum." (Dybvik, 2004) simple things like this can draw unneeded attention to someone who is already in a fragile state. Bringing up the rights that children with special needs have, they touched the tip of the iceberg when it came to laws. One law specifically passed was the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA. IDEA Act lead me to doing more research on what this law really did

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for children with Autism. The article was put out by an organization affiliated with Harvard University making it a reliable source when it came to the author also.

Maine Department of Education, (2013). *Individuals with disabilities education act (idea)*. Retrieved from website:  
<http://www.maine.gov/doe/specialed/idea/index.html>

This covers exactly what Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA is. The IDEA is a government funded program with two parts Part C covers children from birth to age two while Part B covers children age two through twenty-two. Specifically Part C makes sure that, “early intervention will be available to every eligible child and his or her family.” making sure that every child and family gets help the child needs. Part B covers, “IDEA Part B is a federal grant program that provides funds to ensure that eligible students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education that includes special education and related services designed to meet their individual needs.” this would allow children to now have IEP which is an individual learning plan. The individual learning plan is a custom plan to alter the child’s learning from changing how many problems the child does on assignment or teaching the child another approach to complete an assignment.

Moody , A. (2012). *The education for all handicapped children act: A faltering step towards integration*. (Master's thesis) Retrieved from  
<http://commons.trincoll.edu/edreform/2012/05/the-education-for-all-handicapped-children-act-a-faltering-step-towards-integration/>

Another law implemented in public schools was The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142), “which required all schools

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receiving federal funding to provide handicapped children equal access to education and mandated that they be placed in the least restrictive educational environment possible.” (Moody, 2012) I was surprised to be informed that there was not any Federal government placed requirements on schools to educate children with disabilities. There was not any formal law till the mid 1970’s. Appalled that prior to the law most states and school districts were allowed to refuse an education to any student. This made me realize that because children with disabilities were not allowed in mainstreamed classrooms could be why teachers may be having problems managing their classroom.

(2013). Your child's rights. *Individualized Education Program (IEP): Summary, Process and Practical Tips*, Retrieved from <http://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism/your-childs-rights>

Every special needs child has the right to free and appropriate education under the Disabilities Education Act. It states that “each state provide all eligible children with a public education that meets their Individual needs.” Parents are entitled to be treated as an equal partner with the school district in deciding on an education plan for the child and his or her individual needs. The school district is not required to provide the best or optimal education for special needs children, but rather an appropriate education, Free and Appropriate Public Education. There has to be a collaborative process between the parents and the school district to determine what can be provided for the children. The least restrictive environment means that the children should be placed in the environment in



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which he or she has the greatest possible opportunity to interact with children who do not have a disability and to participate in the general education curriculum. There are early intervention services that allow children under the age of three to receive early services who have developmental delay or a physical mental condition likely to result in a developmental delay. These are aimed at minimizing the impact of disabilities on the development of the children. Special education services focus on providing children with an education regardless of the disabilities and special needs. Along with special education services, there are extended school year services that give extra experience and education for children in long school breaks (summer) to prevent regression.

Berneir, R. (2014). Autism. *The Nemours Foundation/KidsHealth*, Retrieved from [http://kidshealth.org/teen/diseases\\_conditions/learning/autism.html](http://kidshealth.org/teen/diseases_conditions/learning/autism.html)

Catered specifically to teens this cite goes over specifically what Autism is. They address six main points What is Autism? What Causes Autism? How is Autism Diagnosed? What's it Like to Have ASD? How Is Autism Treated? and, When Someone You Know Is on the Autism Spectrum. Each section is put into context that is understandable for a teen. This cite would be great to use in a mainstreamed classroom as a resource. With the source being scholarly due to the information being put out by Raphael Berneir PhD, It hits almost every category or questions a kid or even an adult may have when wanting to know what Autism is. My favorite section was the last section that went over what to do if you know someone with Autism. "If

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you know someone who is on the autism spectrum, try to be understanding and patient.” (Berneir, 2014) This was a common theme I came across in many articles. I thought that this was a golden rule when in any setting when a child has Autism.

Gold, A. (n.d.). *Santa cruz (special education school, autism/dd)*. Retrieved from <http://www.mayinstitute.org/location.html?id=168>

I was surprised to find out that there are actual schools that have been designed for children with Autism to attend. The school is located in Santa Cruz, California and is designed for children starting at age five to twenty two. The school is an actual boarding school. There is a one to one student ratio to teacher at the school. This will allow each student to get proper instruction. Every teacher at the school has their credential along with aids being certified. This school is also a nonprofit and not state funded which I found alarming. They also have campuses in over five other states.

### **Connect teachers, parents, and children to disability awareness cites.**

In recent years there has been more and more websites created to inform people about mental and physical disabilities. The National Institute of Neurological Disorders, and the Stroke National Institutes of Health also known as the NINDS along with Kids Health Organization have created web pages that are easy to access and navigate. Each website offers accurate information about physical and mental disabilities.

The NINDS cite was put out by the government and the Office of Communications, Public Liaison National Institute of Neurological Disorders, and

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the Stroke National Institutes of Health. While the Kids Health Organization cite was put out by board certified doctors and peer reviewed what they call a, “rigorous 18-step process” (Kids Health, 2014) both cites are written by trust worthy authors.

The difference between the two cites is that the NINDS caters their website towards adults where the Kids Health cite makes the information available for children’s comprehension level all the way up to the adult comprehension level.

Going into great depth both the NINDS website along with Kids Health target people who want to know general information about many physical and mental disorders. I went through many of the disorders to make sure the information given out was consistent on each disorder regardless between the two cites you chose to use. Every disorder answered the following questions on the NINDS cite along with the kids health cite, “What is the (disorder)? What are some common signs of (disorder)? How is (the disorder diagnosed)? What causes (disorder)? What role does inheritance play? Do symptoms of (disorder) change over time? Is there any treatment? What is the prognosis? What research is being done?” along with providing a list of organizations you can contact if you wanted more information about any disorder. While the other cite responds to these common questions,”.

### **Laws making sure children with disabilities get proper help.**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Disabilities Education Act both try to make a difference in special needs children’s lives. Each Act is involved with the child’s IEP, which stand for Individual Learning Plan. Disabilities Education Act and Disabilities Education Act along with the Disabilities Act both a government

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funded programs. “Early intervention will be available to every eligible child and his or her family.” Is something each program strives for, making sure that every child and family gets help the child needs. The individual learning plan is a custom plan to alter the child’s learning from changing how many problems the child does on assignment or teaching the child another approach to complete an assignment.

### **Context**

Robert Down Elementary School is located in Pacific Grove on the Monterey Peninsula five blocks away from the ocean. This school was the first public school in Pacific Grove; it opened on Monday, April 13, 1891. When first opened there were only four classrooms, each was equal in size. Since the opening of the school in 1891 the school has grown over triple the size with add on of more classrooms.

Linda Williams is the current principal; she can be reached at [lwilliams@pgusd.org](mailto:lwilliams@pgusd.org).

There are currently 432 children who attended the school last year.

Demographically white is their predominate race with 67%, Hispanic is 13%, Asian is 9%, two or more races 9%, Black is 2%, and 1% is American Indian/ Alaska Native. The school also offers an hour of physical education every day along with arts including band, chorus, computer, arts, dance, and drawing/ painting offered free for all students. Centered in the middle of the school is a community garden. Every classroom participates with the maintenance of the garden including every special education class. The average class size is 21 students per teacher. Robert Down promotes a positive environment for every student to be successful in the school.

### **Participants and Participant Selection**

We invited several teachers and students to participate in this study. This group of prospective participants was invited to participate because their relevant experience/expertise/ knowledge/ membership in the school/roles and responsibilities/opinions matter. <sup>1</sup>

### **Researcher**

As a college student with four and a half years of education under our belts, we have obtained an understanding about the importance of a comfortable learning environment. With less than a semester to go we will have a degree in liberal studies “Liberal Studies degree is designed positively impact the lives of children, share our love of learning, and/or contribute to beneficial social change through education. Along with it will provide you with an opportunity to gain the knowledge, skills and perspectives you will need to succeed.” (CSUMB CATALOGY LIBERAL STUDIES) and a minor in Human Movement “In this minor we learned how to discover how to provide an environment for all children to learn within their own limitations and style, at their own pace, and alongside their peers.” (CSUMB CATALOG HUMAN MOVEMENT) With all this training and knowledge we have obtained within the last years, we want to make a difference for each student.

### **Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions**

The following questions bellows are what the researchers used to collect data.

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<sup>1</sup> Participation and participates section will be revised next week when interviews will be conducted.

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### **Teacher Interview**

- 1.) On average how many students in your classroom have a disability?
- 2.) How involved are you in a child's IEP?
- 3.) What type of accommodations do you have in your classroom for children with disabilities? (Example: yoga balls, stress balls)
- 4.) How helpful do you think aids are in your classroom?
- 5.) How do you plan lesson plans to fit every child needs?
- 6.) Is it a challenge to get every child to participate?
- 7.) Do you agree with mainstreaming children in the classroom? If so why? If not why?
- 8.) If a child has a episode in class how do you manage the classroom?
- 9.) What words of advice do you have to promote a comfortable learning environment for all students?

### **Special Education Teacher Interview**

- 1.) How involved are you in a child's IEP?
- 2.) What type of accommodations do you have in your classroom for children with disabilities? (Example: yoga balls, stress balls)
- 3.) How helpful do you think aids are in your classroom?
- 4.) How do you plan lesson plans to fit every child needs?
- 5.) Is it a challenge to get every child to participate?
- 6.) Do you agree with mainstreaming children in the classroom? If so why? If not why?
- 7.) If a child has a episode in class how do you manage the classroom?

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- 8.) What words of advice do you have to promote a comfortable learning environment for all students?
- 9.) How do you filter triggers out of your classroom? (Example: Some students are sensitive to noise.)
- 10.) Do you think the children are treated with compassion while mainstreamed?

### **Student Interview**

- 1.) Do you notice anyone in your classroom that has a different learning style than you? If so what makes it different.
- 2.) What do you do if a child in your class has a behavioral issue? Did your teacher give you advice on what to do?
- 3.) Did you know that your school has an Autistic club on campus?
- 4.) Do you know what a disability is?

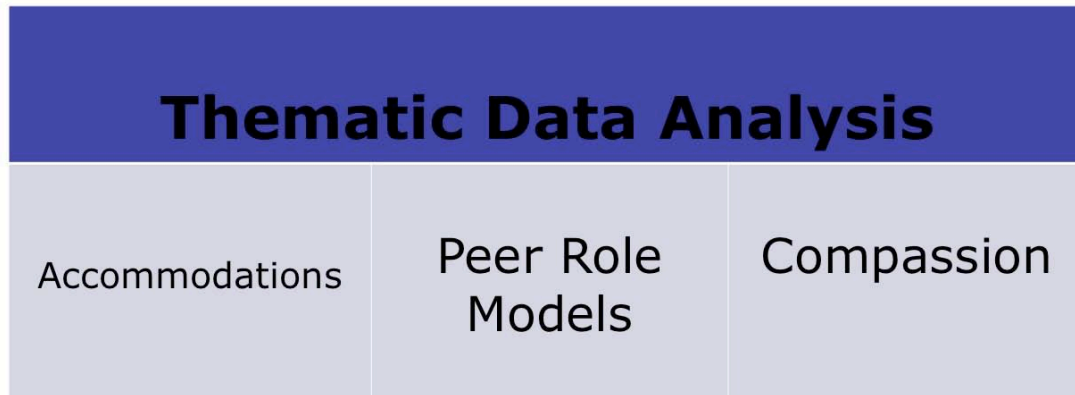
### **Procedure**

Participants will be interviewed. All interviews will be done individually. When it is not possible to interview participants in person, they will be invited to complete a phone interview or online interview. Face-to-Face interviews will take less than one hour, audio-recorded (with participant consent), and take place in the teacher's classroom. A semi-structured interview format will be used for face-to-face interviews, to allow for follow-up questions due to unclear responses, interesting or unexpected responses. All interviews will be scheduled at the convenience of the interviewee and should take approximately 25 minutes to complete.

### **Data Analysis**

Transcribed interviews will be coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

## Results



There were three themes that came out of the research via the surveys. Every person interviewed came up with the same response. Accommodations for students are key, peer role models are positive in the classroom setting, and that compassion is key when dealing with any student. These three things could make the biggest difference to make a child feel safe and comfortable in the classroom setting.

When it comes to accommodations teachers and aids stressed the importance of accommodations in the classroom. Some of the accommodations included yoga balls, timeouts, fidgets (meaning manipulatives: squishy hand ball to squeeze etc.), and verbal cue cards. Each of these tools allows the child to stay more focused in class.

Peer Role Models can be children with or without a disability. When children see someone following directions or having responsible behavior they become a role model for other students. One persons response on the survey was, "Mainstreaming is important to involve students with disabilities in order to not



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highlight or separate them for their peer.” this made it clear that children with disabilities need to be included in every setting.

Compassion is key in any setting. When working with children with disabilities, you need to take breath and understand that it may take a student just a little longer to complete something than their peers. “All students and people are different, so try to be patient and understanding of the differences of all students and people.” The quote was directly pulled from one of the interviews that was taken. Every interview shared that they thought every teacher or aid needs to take time for students and to have compassion.

### **Description and Justification**

Based on our research we were able to create tools that teachers can use in their classrooms. The tools can be used to help spread awareness about physical and mental impairments. For teachers we created a quick pull out a pamphlet along with a Prezi presentation about disabilities each can be implemented to start making of a difference in the classroom. The method was implemented inside a fifth grade classroom, but can be reproduced in any grade level classroom setting.

For the pamphlet portion it includes quick tips about many common impairments. Also it has quick tips and definitions of the most common disabilities, and common behaviors the person with the disability might have. Lastly it has two links you can share with parents and students that talk about specific disabilities. One website is geared for children’s reading level and the other is in adult context.

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On the pamphlet we made sure to emphasize compassion. This was the theme we found most repeated when reviewing the surveys.

Prezi is very similar to PowerPoint, but becomes more engaging for students; due to the difference in layout. The Prezi covers the top ten impairments, and provides just a bite size of information about each impairment. It will create a conscious awareness for children about the given impairments. At the end of the Prezi there is anti bullying activity. Each child will take out a half piece of paper. Then right an incident that they had been or seen someone being bullied. It did not matter if the incident was at school or at home. Then when they are done writing their incident; they would fold it up and bring it up and put in a bag. Once everyone was done each child would pull a paper and read it loud for the class. By reading an anonymous paper the child would feel better sharing about the incident. The children would then be able to recognize that everyone has been bullied or dealt with a bully in their life. Children could conclude that no one likes to be bullied. The link below provides the Prezi that anyone can use inside their classroom or home.

[http://prezi.com/nlmfoecczon8/?utm\\_campaign=share&utm\\_medium=copy&rc=ex0share](http://prezi.com/nlmfoecczon8/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy&rc=ex0share)

### Action Documentation and Reflection

	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Time</b>
<b>Brochure</b>	Color Copies: \$60.00  Black and White Copies: Free at School	10 minutes
<b>Prezi</b>	Free	15-20 minutes
<b>Activity</b>	Ream of Paper: Free	10 minutes

The action that we took was spreading the word at Robert Down Elementary School to students and teachers, that we must be aware that people may have a disability. This impacted the way teachers and students viewed their peers. In fact, by showing students that children with disabilities are just like us gave students a different outlook on their peers. Originally before the lesson plans students didn't know that a disability could be naked to the eye. By creating the awareness we could help implement a program that fostered compassionate students and teacher. I personally ended up doing a trial run inside a fifth grade classroom at Robert Down Elementary School. The children all benefited from the lesson plan and activity. The fifth grade teacher said the lesson was amazing and never thought of addressing disabilities using a Prezi or at all inside the classroom.

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The main point with in this project was the process that my partner and I went through. It was the way people could incorporate disability awareness within the community, school, or classrooms. From the beginning of the project to the end we realized along the way that we needed to alter some of our actions being placed. From little things by tweaking the anti- bullying activity the tweak went from originally planning to have the child read their own story out loud to not having them read their own story at all. We altered it by having the children read another child's' anonymously written story out loud to the class. This really made a difference because the child no longer felt embarrassed to share their story with their peers. Our community partner was Robert Down Elementary School.

The main thing that we would discontinue doing was during the presentation of information. When doing the Prezi and anti- bullying activity it would have been best to do them together. It would have been best that way, so student could use the information they just learned, to really have compassion when children were sharing the bullying stories. From the beginning to the end of the semester we worked on the action. This actually worked well because we gained a better understanding of the children. Personally I got children to really open up and share by creating an environment where they felt safe. I was happy to see that our activities fostered an environment that gave a glimpse into what it could feel like to be bullied. I shared facts about what percent of children with impairments got bullied and the affects it had on children. Every child couldn't believe how many children were bullied and wanted to do anything they could do to help stop bullies at school.

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Originally my partner and I became partners because we had the same interest within disability awareness. After all we all wanted to help out children with disabilities. While going through this semester I noticed that it would have been easier to do our research separate the level of interest in the topic was completely different. If we had to do this project over again I would of not had a partner but would of worked individually. If I would choose to have a partner in the future, I would make sure from the start they were on the same page as me.

### **Critical Reflection**

While working on this project I got to understand the way I work a little better. I now know from this project that I work better writing or processing work early in the morning. During this time I feel focused and on track with my mind focused on the set topic. I came across a few minor struggles in my project but they felt huge when I came across them. In reality the struggle was very minor and I just needed to stay positive. By taking a step back I got the chance to realize that everything was going to be okay and I would get through it.

Over my courses at CSU Monterey Bay I have found out a lot about myself. My freshman year in particular Liberal Studies class 298 with Scott Waltz strikes a bell for me. In this class I got to work in a moderate to severe classroom, for my service learning class. Before taking this class I was biology major. The passion my Professor brought to the classroom plus the experience I got in the classroom, made me decide to change my major. I knew from that class on, I had to work with the special education students specifically children with Autism.

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The experience I have been getting in my service learning courses at CSU Monterey Bay prepared me for my Capstone. These service-learning classes made me become a better communicator, which transferred directly into me developing my community partner. Presenting a topic to students in the elementary level class was also practiced in Service Learning. Again when it came to presenting my lesson plan, part of my action portion of capstone, I had the practice in my course work so I was prepared.

It is hard to believe that I am finally going to graduate with a Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies and a Minor in Human Movement. I have currently applied for jobs as a behavior analyst in the Southern California area. Later after working awhile I want to go back to school and receive a Masters Degree to continue my education. I can say I am prepared for my future and cannot wait what lies ahead.

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