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-2. 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 will earn my Master’s in Special Education with an emphasis in Autism along with a Graduate Certificate in Behavior Analysis which will allow me to test to become a Board Certified Behavior Analysis. 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.

As a teacher of children with special needs I realize that no two children are alike and they each learn in their own special and individual way. As their teacher it is my responsibility bring out the highest potential of learning in our class and to make sure I have the knowledge to do so. 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. I, as their teacher, owe them the same determination in my teaching and need to continue to learn and grow in my own profession. Finally, I believe I’m definitely blessed to be teaching in the area of PreK Special Education and though I am passionate in giving my students all that I have to give them, I believe that what they have given me and have taught me is more than I could offer them. In our classroom, we learn together and never give up! It’s not the teacher who is special, but in my case, it’s the students!