

**Title of Session:** Special Education Forum

**Moderator:** Paul Bohac

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Room: After School Online

**BJB2:** shall we start with introductions?

**BJB2:** I'm an art teacher in a male juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania

**MarianneW:** Hi..I am working on an internet course....a section is on chatrooms and this site was mentioned

**PaulDB:** I'm retired but still working.

**BJB2:** Marianne, can you please tell us where you are located and what you teach?

**MarianneW:** I work at a public HS (3100 students) and have some inclusion students in my science classes (Biology, Horticulture and Botany)

**MarianneW:** I teach in CT

**BJB2:** Paul is on a beach listening to the surf in Florida

**PaulDB:** What kinds of exceptionalities are most common among your "included" students?

**BJB2:** . o O ( nice shirt, Paul )

**PaulDB:** Thanks, BJ

**MarianneW:** Impulsivity, problems with comprehension, ADD, etc.

**PaulDB:** Actually, I am currently working on a DOL grant application for re-entry of ex-offenders.

**BJB2:** Paul, are you familiar with Shakespeare Behind Bars?

**BJB2:** . o O ( Curt Tofteland is the director )

**PaulDB:** Marginally, but can not really discuss it.

**BJB2:** Curt is working on a program for re-entry using his Shakespeare Behind Bars theater experience

**BJB2** looks for a url

**PaulDB:** What I know about it is that the use of drama is effective in helping incarcerated "go outside" themselves and perhaps develop some sense of empathy for their victims.

**BJB2:** Curt has a documentary out...making the film festival rounds. Think it's been picked up by PBS

[Ed.: <http://www.csmonitor.com/specials/shakespeare/> ;  
<http://www.itvs.org/search/ataglance.htm?showID=1038>

**BJB2:** I'm off the topic though...what is your re-entry grant going to be about?

**TomTab** joined the room.

**JeffC** . o O ( many educators have online ADD )

**BJB2** . o O ( a new group about grant writing is starting in July, btw )

**BJB2:** Hi, Tom

**TomTab:** hi

**PaulDB:** I know there was a program sponsored by an organization known as Responsible Fatherhood that tried to create opportunities for fathers behind bars to interact with their kids.

**BJB2** nods solemnly to Jeff.

**PaulDB:** The grant is intended to develop a seamless system between the institution and the community.

**BJB2:** cool. I recently also found a site about Fathers and cooking that was interesting too

**BJB2:** <http://www.realmencook.com/>

**PaulDB:** Involves working within the institution and developing community resources that will support and re-enforce what is happening within the institution regarding substance abuse counseling, education, training and ultimately employment.

**BJB2:** by community do you mean the community to which the individual will return?

**PaulDB:** It has my interest because if one accepts the premise that the purpose of the institution is to prepare the inmate for return to the community, then there should be some overlap between the institutions and the community.

**BJB2:** Tom, we're discussing a grant that Paul has written

**PaulDB:** Yes, the primary focus is the community where the inmate will return after release.

**PaulDB:** 95% of all inmates will eventually get out and go "home".

**PaulDB:** It is not written, it is being written.

**BJB2:** there is a major conflict here in Harrisburg about the closing of the state mental hospital. Same issues about where the residents will go when the hospital is no longer a resource. One columnist stated that there are more mental health cases in prisons than in hospitals

**PaulDB:** I did not mean to digress but I think as a topic, "transition" is a critical need within the Special Education program.

**BJB2** agrees completely

**DavidWe** joined the room.

**PaulDB:** He is correct. If you review the most recent monograph by the National Mental Health Institute, they are reporting that as many as 60 to 75% of all inmates have some type of mental health needs.

**BJB2:** the person who wrote the article was stating that our society has reverted back to incarceration for people with mental health issues rather than treatment. Obviously the issue isn't so cut and dried, but he did have a point

**BJB2:** so...if we discuss transitions....

**PaulDB:** In the context of "transition", whether for a special ed student or a delinquent coming back from incarceration or an adult offender about to be released, there is need for resources to be identified, for needs to be identified and for some entity to be responsible for matching the needs to the resources.

**DavidWe** wonders if incarceration seems "cheaper" in the short term or long term

**BJB2:** Paul, I am a huge fan of transitions, but it seems that it's such an overwhelming task

**PaulDB:** Good point David. There seems to be some support for it being cheaper in the short term but much more expensive in the long-term.

**DavidWe** nods

**JeffC:** Oftentimes a school (teacher, admin, etc.) will just "check out" and give up on a student... or groups of students. Our district just was sued because it failed to diagnose a student with ADD... ended up paying thousands for private school.

**DavidWe:** We're so short-term oriented at the moment

**PaulDB:** Here in Florida, any time a judge sentences an offender to a sentence of 25 years or more, the Dept. of Corrections knows that at least 5 correctional officers will have a job from initial employment to retirement.

**PaulDB:** That may be due, David, to the things that we evaluate. As the adage goes: We respect what we inspect.

**PaulDB:** Look at NCLB act and think in terms of Annual Yearly Progress and then think in terms of a 12-year public school program.

**PaulDB:** We should be looking at what we want the youth to be able to do upon completion and then working backward to look at annual goals and objectives.

**DavidWe** smiles

**PaulDB:** If we think about transition in that context, then we should be asking ourselves to identify what it is we want of our children, then we should be trying to determine if our children can achieve the goals we have set and then we need to be able to change those goals as the child grows and develops.

**DavidWe:** From 1958 to 1967 approximated 500 colleges (mostly community colleges) opened. That's close to 1 per week over a 10 year period

**PaulDB:** Of course, I do not know too many jobs where a youth spends his/her entire day doing multiple choice activities to find the right answer.

**DavidWe** smiles

**DavidWe** . o O ( Starbucks? )

**PaulDB:** Okay, you got me on that one!!

**BJB2** laughs

**PaulDB:** But why have those colleges opened?

**DavidWe:** G.I. bill + baby boom

**PaulDB:** What do they offer?

**BJB2** . o O ( to teach remedial classes to people who want to go to reg colleges )

**PaulDB:** But I have read that there is a suggestion that all colleges do is prepare students to work for the government.

**DavidWe:** community colleges have tended to be opportunities for transitions: new careers, new technologies...

**PaulDB:** Do we really think that a college degree is in the realm of many of our special education youth?

**DavidWe:** Well isn't there a lot of "socialization" that goes on in K-12 education?

**DavidWe** has high hopes for all

**DavidWe** grins

**PaulDB:** Yes, it is the community college where the real growth should be happening.

**DavidWe** nods

**BJB2:** good point, David. Industry demands are different....no longer can you be employed by the same employer for 30 years and look forward to a nice pension when you retire....lots of transitioning going on

**PaulDB:** They serve the local community which is what the public school K-12 system is supposed to be doing.

**PaulDB:** Community colleges as well as the vo-tech centers offer a real opportunity to our special education kids.

**BJB2:** what is the solution? Should the public school system be expected to meet the needs of a special needs child?

**PaulDB:** The community college and the vo-tech centers have the time and many times the class size to accommodate the unique needs of our population.

**DavidWe** thinks BJ has asked a critical question

**PaulDB:** I believe the public school system can meet the needs of the special education youth. But I think to do so will require a re-organization of the system.

**BJB2:** Here, here!

**BJB2:** perhaps that is the main problem...we keep adding and band-aiding to meet the next new requirement

**PaulDB:** Elementary grades should have the smallest class sizes so as to build the foundation. Middle school should have more flexibility as to how it is structured with a balance between academic classes and more career exploration.

**BJB2:** now we get to teacher education...are they prepared to work with special needs children? Do they get adequate education in identifying a sped child?

**PaulDB:** High school should also be smaller although class sizes could be greater. What is needed is less emphasis on academics and more emphasis on practical, career orientation and possible work experience.

**BJB2** . o O ( and working with a special ed teacher )

**PaulDB:** At the present time, there is a growing emphasis on providing all education majors with increased exposure to the special education population characteristics.

**PaulDB:** It will take some time before there is a "shared, common understanding" between those who seek certification in a special education area and those who seek certification in what NCLB refers to as "core content".

**PaulDB:** What may drive that is the required "dual certification" as demanded in NCLB.

**PaulDB:** But again, what is the purpose of education? What is it we want our children to be able to do when they graduate, earn a certificate of attendance or a special education diploma?

**David**We runs out to the library

**BJB2** wishes Tom would give us some input

**BJB2:** does anyone have a definition of the purpose of education?

**PaulDB:** It is my humble opinion that when we talk about "education" we should really be talking about the transition from school to work and from adolescence to adulthood.

**PaulDB:** What do you think Tom?

**BJB2:** if we just look at the transition from school to work, that still covers a lot of territory

**PaulDB:** My favorite quote regarding the purpose of education is " the purpose of education is not to learn how to earn one's daily bread, but rather to learn how to make each bite that much sweeter".

**PaulDB:** Training is not the same as education, but training is a part of education.

**BJB2** smiles. Nice.

**PaulDB:** Transition is an all-encompassing concept.

**PaulDB:** Some of the societies refer to transition as a "rite of passage".

**BJB2:** In a recent conversation here during an alternative ed discussion, we were talking about student driven IEPs. That opened a can of worms!

**PaulDB:** I find the term "passage" as most illustrative.

**BJB2:** Yes, I like the term passage also

**PaulDB:** Student-led IEP's is a prime example of a "transition" or passage.

**BJB2:** the participants argued that some students are not able to contribute to their IEPs

**PaulDB:** When we acknowledge that the student does have some control over and some responsibility for his/her own future, we are creating the opportunity for that transition from adolescent to adulthood.

**BJB2** cheers.

**PaulDB:** If there is a statement that the youth cannot contribute, then I would suggest that some of the teachers are not exercising their responsibilities to promote the growth of the student.

**PaulDB:** If we want the student to learn, then we must accept the responsibility to teach.

**BJB2:** yeppers.

**PaulDB:** If the student cannot contribute, then he/she has not learned and thus we must not have taught.

**BJB2** . o O ( and we should start with the idea that ALL students can learn )

**PaulDB:** ALL STUDENTS CAN LEARN. But not all students can, will or need to learn the same things or the same way.

**BJB2:** we are in complete agreement, Paul...what bothers me is that everyone else isn't as brilliant as we are

**PaulDB:** With age comes wisdom, what else can I say.

**BJB2** chortles...that isn't the only thing that comes with age.

**PaulDB:** What makes it so hard is that there are conflicting requirements.

**BJB2** nods

**JeffC:** Keeping an IEP out of the hands of a student keeps the whole "teaching" experience teacher (and parent) centered, not student centered. Piaget wouldn't approve. Check out: <http://www.instantprojects.org> ...consider having students create online portfolios, take part in webquests... it's a start anyways.

**PaulDB:** We talk about teaching kids to read, but that could be nothing more than the Dolch 200 most common word list or it might be the works of Sarte.

**JeffC:** IEP= No Exit?

**BJB2:** Individual Education Plan

**JeffC:** Yeah... I know.

**BJB2** thinks all students should have an IEP

**JeffC:** So should teachers (not to mention administrators... who will remain unmentionable).

**BJB2** nods solemnly

**PaulDB:** Well, it is not an IEP, but NCLB does require an IAP for all students.

**PaulDB:** But see, when we talk about "individualized" anything, we create some confusion.

**BJB2:** but isn't that the whole point of transitions? Individualization of needs

**PaulDB:** Every child is different. Every child has some common needs. How do we determine what should be individualized and what should be general for everyone?

**BJB2:** This discussion is fabulous, but our hour has flown by. Shall we take that last comment and post it to the sped group room?

**BJB2:** and ask people to bring responses to the next meeting.

**PaulDB:** The question gets to your point BJ, transition should be individualized according to need.

**PaulDB:** Okay, that sounds like a plan.

**BJB2:** do you want to post, Paul?

**PaulDB:** If you will offer guidance in the process, I shall be most honored to make such a post.

**BJB2:** guidance: go to the group room, click on DISCUSSION on the left menu and then post new topic

**BJB2:** Thanks, Paul, for leading the discussion. I really hate it when you talk...now my brain will be on overdrive for hours and I won't be able to sleep.