

Title of Session: Special Education Forum

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Room: Special Education Forum Group

BJ: Welcome to today's SPED discussion. We usually start all Tapped In discussions with introductions

BJ: please tell us where you are located and what you teach or hope to teach

BJ: I'm an art teacher in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania

ShannahB: I teach reading enrichment at a Junior High in Wichita Falls, TX

PaulDB: I am a retired Correctional Special Education teacher/administrator from Florida

Jennifer10: I am located in Maryland and I teach high school age severe and profoundly handicapped students at a public separate day school

DavidWe: I lead a math education and technology discussion in TappedIn. Right now I'm in Bucks County, PA north of Philadelphia

JudithWA: My name is Judith, a student teacher from UH

PaulDB: Welcome one and all!!

JudithWA: Thanks!

PaulDB: Jennifer is yours a pure special education facility?

Jennifer10: yes ages 3-21

BJ: residential?

PaulDB: So you use a self-contained approach with your students?

Jennifer10: no- day program- same hours as a regular school

Jennifer10: yes

BJ: Paul, did you have a topic for today's discussion?

BJ . o O (perhaps new SPED teachers?)

PaulDB: Last month we discussed Erica's new experiences working in an autistic classroom.

BJ nods

PaulDB: I was hoping we could continue along that vein.

PaulDB: Judith is a student teacher, maybe she has a concern?

BJ . o O (even regular ed teachers will have special ed children in their classrooms)

PaulDB: Jennifer works in a unique situation, maybe she has an issue?

JudithWA: Well I'm doing resource room at this time

PaulDB: So you are engaged in a "pull-out" program?

JudithWA: Yes, But I would really love to work with the CBI

PaulDB: Do you cover all subjects according to the IEP or specific content areas?

Jennifer10: CBI- community based instruction, right?

JudithWA: Reading, writing and math

JudithWA: Yes!

Jennifer10: that is so much fun- community trips are great learning experiences

Jennifer10: so much hands on learning

PaulDB: Is it experiential or is there a "curriculum"?

JudithWA: They are also nice and friendly

Jennifer10: even my students get those opportunities at least twice a month- I am loving it!

ShannahB: Where do you usually take the students?

Jennifer10: There are skills that are addressed for students, but I am unsure if my county has a curriculum

PaulDB: How do you plan such experiences?

PaulDB: Good question Shannon!!

Jennifer10: Local malls, shops, Target, Barnes and Noble- local places like that

JudithWA: Well my concern is whether they have a curriculum or not!

Jennifer10: The kids that can walk and do more go mini golfing, bowling etc

PaulDB: What kinds of activities are planned during such excursions?

PaulDB: Are there objectives to be mastered?

JudithWA: Eager to know more!

Jennifer10: For my group of students- not much- we focus on their appropriate behavior in loud or crowded settings, so that their families can take them out with little fuss- we try to lessen the self stim in public and things like that

PaulDB: So what are the practice activities in the classroom that are planned before taking the kids into the community?

Jennifer10: It is also a good opportunity for our more challenging students to try a short trip- for some it is the only opportunity for them to go anywhere- it is hard for their parents to take them out when they have things to get done

PaulDB: How about a brief description of a trip Jennifer?

PaulDB: That way we could get a feel for what happens.

Jennifer10: We try to address the behaviors that could be disruptive in the community and give them the opportunity to be out in the public- and get used to waiting for what they want

PaulDB: Yes, waiting in line is a learned skill.

Jennifer10: For my class- I usually have them shop for classroom items that we need- snacks, books, things like that- I let them use devices to vote on snacks and we print pictures off the internet or use pic syms to make a list

PaulDB: Delayed gratification is a part of that skill set.

JudithWA: That seems interesting! Are they controllable out there?

Jennifer10: then we allow them to look at the pictures at the store and try to select the item from two presented to see if they can pick the right one

PaulDB: Comparison skills, very good!

Jennifer10: or, if the parent sends money for a gift for a family member, we allow the child to select a gift

JudithWA: making choices too!

Jennifer10: communication and opinions too

PaulDB: Thinking about others, excellent!

Jennifer10: Or I just send "my list" and have them find/select the items

Jennifer10: My one student even got a kick out of carrying my money in her pocket

PaulDB: Do you involve the kids in the development of "your list"?

JudithWA: Independent skills!

Jennifer10: she thought she was a hot shot- with the teachers money

KatarinaF: That is awesome!

PaulDB: Trust, confidence and self-esteem!!

Jennifer10: yeah- I try to treat them like normal teenagers

Jennifer10: they are more normal than most people give them credit for

PaulDB: Creating opportunities to learn consistent with the ability of the youth.

JudithWA: Which is good for them!

Jennifer10: I even let my one student use a device to "remind me " to get certain items

KatarinaF: This will help them in the real world.

Jennifer10: I even programmed it to say "when do I get to shop for my stuff?"

Jennifer10: just like a normal teen would do

PaulDB: Helps them retain a focus as a part of task completion.

Jennifer10: People in the store got a real kick out of her

JudithWA: Are you talking about assistive devices?

Jennifer10: yes- For that particular student I used a "Step by Step communicator"

Jennifer10: That was I could have it loop and keep repeating the phrases

JudithWA: Awesome!

KatarinaF: does the district pay for this equipment?

Jennifer10: It was a good experience for the community as well, a lot of young mothers and children were out at the time and it gave me a chance to educate the public about my students as well

PaulDB: Yes, that is a good question Katarina.

PaulDB: How many do you take at once?

Jennifer10: yes, it belongs to the school, or more specifically my classroom, since I ordered the devices for certain purposes

PaulDB: Do you have a budget or do you order/purchase through a department?

Jennifer10: depends- sometimes one- or one per student- depending on if the student will throw it off the tray or not- I don't want to be responsible for losing them

PaulDB: But how many students go on a trip?

JudithWA: So as a cbi teacher you are also involved in ordering devices?

Jennifer10: My principal usually lets us submit "wish lists" that she fulfills as she has \$ for them- and we also have a stash that is the whole schools. We can trade each year as our students needs change

KatarinaF: Do you have to "convince" the district that it is an important tool, and necessary for your class? or do you have the freedom to order what you deem necessary?

KatarinaF: thanks Jen. just answered my question

Jennifer10: we are trying to take at least 2 students from each classroom- up to 10 at a time- depending on staffing- we rotate who goes- so each student gets to go at least once a month

PaulDB: No Katrina, I think you touch upon an important issue.

JudithWA: How long have you been working with these kids Jenn?

Jennifer10: 5 years

Jennifer10: I have pretty much had the same students

Jennifer10: they stay in my department for 7 yrs

Jennifer10: So I get to know them pretty well

JudithWA: Good experience! I may need your number.

KatarinaF: just out of curiosity have you taught reg. ed. and if you have, do you like spec. ed more?

PaulDB: So you have the time to truly develop a relationship with these children?

Jennifer10: I did, but only during student teaching and I taught preschool for 3 years

Jennifer10: and I really love this population

Jennifer10: yes- I am on a first name basis with my students' parents

JudithWA: I would think so!

Jennifer10: they send gifts for my daughter sometimes and ask about her all the time

KatarinaF: may I ask what is better about this population in your eyes?

Jennifer10: I almost become part of their families

PaulDB: Sounds much like the old "one-room schoolhouse" approach.

BJ . o O (it will be hard to part with that group after 7 years!)

Jennifer10: The closeness I have with them= I am their "surrogate" parent for the day= I feed them, change their diapers, comfort them during and after seizures

Jennifer10: it is hard not to love it, but not many people want the amount of responsibility that I have for them

KatarinaF: WOW!!!

JeffC: In other countries educators do become part of their students' families... they get invited to dinner, etc.

KatarinaF: That is dedication.

Jennifer10: they are medically fragile and totally dependent on me for all their needs

Jennifer10: It even crushes me when I lose one to death- which has happened-nothing can prepare you for that

KatarinaF: It must take incredible patience. What do you find the most challenging?

PaulDB: Jeff you point out one of the differences between American education practices and European and Asian approaches.

JudithWA: It needs someone with a great heart!

PaulDB: But also someone who believes in the importance of education as well.

JudithWA: Sure yes

Jennifer10: yes

Jennifer10: because sometimes educating them can be very frustrating

PaulDB: John Dewey says that the purpose of education is, among other things, to socialize the youth.

KatarinaF: Jeff/Paul. I think other countries are models in education. We can learn a lot from Asian style of education

PaulDB: It would seem that you practice such an approach Jennifer.

Jennifer10: They may only possess a certain capability to learn reading writing and math, but you are always looking for ways to push them farther

Jennifer10: Sometimes I forget that- it is easy to get caught up in the day to day stuff

Jennifer10: thanks

PaulDB: But the "pushing" needs to have a relevant purpose to the child.

Jennifer10: true

Jennifer10: but sometimes that pushing comes from above

Jennifer10: therein lies my frustration

KatarinaF: becoming personal with the families of students can be beneficial in creating teamwork (a partnership in education) however we create a division in America (parent vs. teacher) or even (administrator vs. parent etc.)

PaulDB: I take it that you are not much involved in "high stakes" testing?

Jennifer10: we are, but i am not sure what benefit it has for my students

Jennifer10: the parents want certain things for their children- to be safe, g\fed, clean and happy

PaulDB: That I suspect is the cause for the "pushing" from above.

Jennifer10: the BOE and gov't want them to be educated in the same subject areas as their peers

Jennifer10: the trick is to balance

Jennifer10: that is the hard thing for me= being a parent myself I want them to have the best too

PaulDB: How do you achieve that balance?

JudithWA: The No Child Left Behind!

Jennifer10: not very easily

Jennifer10: sometimes the students dictate that for themselves

PaulDB: In what way?

Jennifer10: I have had to abandon more lessons due to seizures, diaper blow outs and other stuff like that

Jennifer10: It almost seems like they plan it

Jennifer10: laughs

PaulDB: Hummm,

JudithWA: Just curious, If you are becoming a special ed teacher, do you have to take the generalist test as well as spec ed test?

PaulDB: I guess we all tend to react to stress in different ways.

Jennifer10: yes

BJ . o O (manipulation, do you think, Paul?)

Jennifer10: I took both Praxis one and the special ed part of Praxis 2

Jennifer10: I sometimes think so...haha

PaulDB: According to NCLB a special education teacher must be certified in an area of special education AND in one of the core subjects.

Jennifer10: I am also an elementary education and early childhood education person too

Jennifer10: I have degrees in all those areas

SusanR joined the room.

KatarinaF: Jennifer. what in the world?

Jennifer10: I was basically triple certified

BJ: hi, Susan

KatarinaF: That is a lot of certification!

Jennifer10: yeah- it just sort of happened

PaulDB: Then you would be considered "highly qualified".

KatarinaF: sort of?

Jennifer10: I am also currently working on my masters in AT

KatarinaF: AT?

Jennifer10: Assistive technology

KatarinaF: oh. wow. applause to you!

PaulDB: So you are planning to introduce additional technology into your classroom?

Jennifer10: thanks- AT is fun stuff for me- I use it everyday- I just want to do more with it when I can't lift my students out of their wheelchairs any longer

Jennifer10: the body only holds out for so long

PaulDB: May I suggest that you contact the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for possible grant opportunities?

JudithWA: Wow! how do you manage all that?

KatarinaF: understood. It doesn't take long to put wear and tear on the body for a teacher

Jennifer10: I have a lot of staff in my classroom- they are great- I couldn't do it without them

JudithWA: I'm just about to graduate with bachelors and I'm tired!!!

PaulDB: What kind of support staff?

KatarinaF: amen! Judith

PaulDB: Just think Judith, you have a lot to look forward to!!

Jennifer10: I have two program paraprofessionals and one student has a one to one assistant- we have seven students and of course, me

PaulDB: That is an excellent ratio!!

KatarinaF: so four teachers on ten students?

KatarinaF: EXCELLENT

Jennifer10: yeah- I am really lucky, some are not as much

Jennifer10: four to seven

Jennifer10: so it goes out to 2 for me and each para and one to the one on one

PaulDB: And how well do the students get along with each other?

Jennifer10: that way we can each push a chair and pull one behind us and get to places on time

KatarinaF: I see.

Jennifer10: They don't interact so much with each other- some times they do, but it is very brief

PaulDB: How often do you conduct "staff meetings"?

Jennifer10: They function between 3 and 12 months old cognitively

Jennifer10: I have (since I am the department chairperson) weekly department meetings and whole staff meetings are once a month

Jennifer10: We also have groups that meet bi weekly

Jennifer10: we "pow-wow" a lot!

PaulDB: And what kind of staff training is provided?

JudithWA: A good question

KatarinaF: very

Jennifer10: it varies- most of our training is not county wide- since we are so different- our training is based on staff needs- new software, new adaptations of the VSC etc

PaulDB: So it is specific to the needs of the facility.

Jennifer10: definitely

PaulDB: That means it can be tailored to the population of students and to the population of staff.

Jennifer10: we like it that way- otherwise we feel like our time is wasted if we attend meetings for general ed

PaulDB: How often is such training provided?

KatarinaF: what a concept !

Jennifer10: we have two full days 2x a year

JudithWA: Tell us something about transition programs for these students Jenn.

KatarinaF: No cookie cutter training sessions that take up time and you know will not work for your students?

Jennifer10: and we can attend conferences that we find interesting whenever

PaulDB: And you supplement that with on-site local activities?

Jennifer10: yes

BJ is interested in transition services also

PaulDB: Good question about transition Judith!!

Jennifer10: transition is mainly the parents selecting a place for them to attend after they graduate- we assist them as much as we can with a transition assistant- transition fairs etc

Jennifer10: we try to provide the parents with as much info as possible

PaulDB: But the intent is to keep the kids in the community?

JudithWA: I would really want to know more before I get hired.

PaulDB: So we are talking about sheltered workshops, etc.?

Jennifer10: all of my students will move to a day program in a nearby town within the county

Jennifer10: there are other options such as work enclaves and sheltered workshops in the area for more able bodied students

PaulDB: Who funds these various post-school opportunities?

Jennifer10: some parents select for their child to go residential depending on their needs

KatarinaF: And what do those workshops entail.

Jennifer10: usually DDA provides funding

JudithWA: Good question

PaulDB: What is DDA?

Jennifer10: some have contracts with businesses to collate materials or assemble simple items for them

Jennifer10: Developmental Disabilities Administration

PaulDB: So that is a state government agency?

Jennifer10: Some make/grow items to sell- it varies by agency

Jennifer10: Yes, I do believe

Jennifer10: Transition is not my main forte- so my info on it is limited

KatarinaF: This is all very interesting. I am happy I attended and will take this info with me on my first year of teaching.

JudithWA: I think I'm at the right place, because lots of ideas are being shared!

PaulDB: I am impressed that from your description there seems to be in place a continuum of care for your kids.

Jennifer10: good luck and enjoy it- it goes fast

BJ thinks we have an angel among us. Jennifer, I admire your work.

Jennifer10: somewhat- it is close, but the agencies are not educational facilities

Jennifer10: Thanks

BJ: we are nearly out of time...any requests for topics for next month?

Jennifer10: but they do stimulate them and keep them clean fed safe and happy- that is all the kids want

JudithWA: This has been very educative evening!

PaulDB: They don't have to be, the issue is from school to post-school adult living, however such adult living is defined.

BJ . o O (May 15)

Jennifer10: good luck to all the new teachers out there

KatarinaF: I agree with BJ. Jennifer it is people like you who make a good model for other teachers and loving fig. for the kids.

Jennifer10: enjoy that first year- you will never forget it

KatarinaF: thanks!

JudithWA: Probably that time I'll have a job after my graduation

PaulDB: BJ, I like these discussions from within the group. Perhaps we should ask for a volunteer for next month?

BJ looks around the room for a volunteer

PaulDB: Being a new teacher is exciting as well as frustrating.

BJ agrees

PaulDB: Having the opportunity to talk with more experienced teachers is always beneficial.

JudithWA: I have benefited a lot!

Jennifer10: I am glad!

KatarinaF: yes. at first I thought this would be just another requirement, that takes time, but I see it has many benefits i can take to my classroom

PaulDB: Jennifer, this month, like Erica last month, has introduced a new perspicitive for all of us.

BJ: Paul, why don't you post to the group discussion board and see if anyone comes forward?

Jennifer10: yes- I wish I would have had something like this my first year

Jennifer10: I just didn't know it was here!

KatarinaF: neither did Judith and I.

KatarinaF: At least I didn't

PaulDB: I will be glad to do that if you will help me with the technical aspects of the task.

JudithWA: mmm!! lots of learning

BJ: the collaboration is one of the best features of Tapped In

BJ: Paul, attach your chat window

BJ: then click on DISCUSSION on the blue menu

BJ: and post a new topic

PaulDB: Hey, we are all teachers or will soon be teachers and our lives are devoted to helping others learn and learn how to learn.

BJ applauds...bravo!

PaulDB: Got it. Will follow through.

Jennifer10: and you never stop learning for yourself!

BJ: I hope you will be able to join us next month, everyone

SusanR: Thanks all...I must slip out for dinner ..fine discussion

BJ waves goodnight

KatarinaF: Very true. If you stop learning how can you teach others new things, right?

Jennifer10: good night all

KatarinaF: everyone have a nice evening

PaulDB: Thank you Jennifer for your willingness to contribute this evening. It has been helpful to all of us.