

Title of Session: Special Education Forum - Assessment

Moderator: BJ Berquist and Paul Bohac

Title of File: 20070416sped

Date: April 16, 2007

Room: Special Education Forum Group

BJB2: Welcome to today's Special Education Forum.

BJB2: We're waiting for Paul Bohac, the discussion leader to arrive

BJB2: while we wait, let's start with introductions

BJB2: please tell us where you are located and what you teach or hope to teach

ShayneTr: I'm an art and computer teacher in Toronto, Canada

BrittanyT: I am currently student teaching at Garfield Elementary and would like to teach kindergarten.

MichelB: I am student teaching 4th grade right now

BJB2: I'm in Pennsylvania and teach remedial communication

MichelB: I'm in Houston

BJB2 looks around the room

MeghanML: I'm in Houston also.

CeliaCh: I am not a teacher, but I am interested in this topic, so ...

BJB2: great, Celia. What do you do?

CeliaCh: I am an English major in Taiwan.

BJB2: thanks, Celia.

ShayneTr: By the way, I think it's great that student teachers are on Tapped In

MichelB: I think tapped is a great tool

RigoS: what will today's discussion be about! (Details)

BJB2 agrees with Shayne about student teachers

BJB2: good question, Rigo!

CeliaCh: Indeed

BJB2: Paul isn't here yet so we may have to figure out a topic on our own. Anyone interested in special ed?

MichelB: I am in a co- teach classroom right now

BJB2: . o O (or have any experience with special ed?)

MichelB: I love it

BJB2: what is a co-teach classroom, Michel?

MichelB: We have three students with asperger

MeghanML: I am looking into it...

RigoS: I'm interested in special education, I wanted to minor in it but they couldn't offer it for kinesiology majors

ShayneTr: I've taken part of my Special Ed certification on-line. I work with a lot of special needs kids who are integrated into a regular class.

BJB2: my personal feeling is that all educators should have courses in special ed.

MichelB: it is a full inclusion which mean all special ed are mixed with regular performing students

RigoS: I agree

MeghanML: I agree

ShayneTr: My daughter is in a concurrent education program. She started placement today and tomorrow she's going to a special ed classroom. I'm delighted!

BJB2: I hope she's as delighted, Shayne!

MeghanML: that's great. We can always use special ed. teachers...

BJB2: the discussions for the past couple of months have focused around assessment

MichelB: It keeps me on my toes everyday it is so exciting from day to day

ShayneTr: Yes, but they tired her out today she's resting. Sometimes she sits with me when I'm on Tapped In and you get a two-for-one. She's actually doing art and English.

BJB2: what do you think assessment for special needs students would look like?

BJB2: . o O (or should look like?)

ShayneTr: Sometimes the curriculum is modified, sometimes the student would get a whole different program, depending upon the needs.

MichelB: modified for their specific needs

BrittanyT: I think assessment would be more limited to special education students.

RigoS: I agree with Michel

BJB2: are assessment and adaptation the same thing?

MichelB: We plan for the reg. classroom and make modification for each specific student and their need

MeghanML: I think the classrooms should be smaller. i know in some of the schools I have been at the special ed. teacher would have too many students to focus specifically on ones needs.

BrittanyT: I don't think there is a relation at all.

MeghanML: but big enough so they students can be social

CeliaCh: They seem be two different things

ShayneTr: I'm not sure what you mean BJ... we can adapt a curriculum and assess the outcome.

MichelB: Oh ya the co-teach classroom has two teachers at all times one reg ed and one special ed

RigoS: I believe that they should be grouped with kids with the similar needs. It will be a lot easier to teach the students

BrittanyT: Yes, but you shouldn't seclude the students from every one else.

ShayneTr: Except that it's not always practical. I work at a tiny school.

BJB2: I'm responding to assessment being modified for special needs

MichelB: I agree with Brittany

BJB2: I think of modification as related to adaptive tech

ShayneTr: Also, sometimes there is a benefit to having one student help another - teaches leadership, helps reinforce the lesson and friendship.

MeghanML: true

MichelB: the regular ed students have learned so much by being in the same learning environment as the special ed kids

RigoS: that's true too, but there can be a time in class when you can do this... I don't mean the whole class lecture.

BrittanyT: I definitely think assessment should be modified for special needs.

MichelB: Shayne we do that all the time

MichelB: even if it is reading to the other student

MeghanML: we shouldn't limit the special needs students from getting the full experience of education in a classroom

BJB2: examples of special needs?

RigoS: They should be modified to help them understand the assessment better

MichelB: you would be amazed at how these students step up and take leadership to help the students who need

BrittanyT: Or there should be special help available to the students

MeghanML: I agree there should be special help

RigoS: I strongly agree too

ShayneTr: Need extra time, need instructions broken down, need to be hands-on instead of listening, need some one-on-one (for which you need other students to help, sometimes).

BJB2: what is the purpose of assessment?

BrittanyT: the purpose is to test what the student's know.

MichelB: to see what/ how the students are progressing

ShayneTr: To check if student is getting it

MeghanML: extra time should be allowed for the students...I completely agree with that

BJB2: any other reasons for assessment?

ShayneTr: or perhaps to see if the teacher is getting it - maybe we need to change our approach!

BJB2 smiles and nods to Shayne

MichelB: I LIKE THAT

MichelB: we learn everyday from our students

MichelB: I think they teach just as much as we teach them

MeghanML: me too

MichelB: us

ConnieV: I agree

MeghanML: I have a friend with a child that has autism and he knows more about a computer than I think I will ever know, he is always teaching me something

RigoS: how often should assessments be given to the students...once a week....once a month

MichelB: one of our asperger students knows more about trains than I will ever know

BrittanyT: I think it all depends on what the teacher is teaching.

RigoS: you mean. how long it takes to go over the topic?

ShayneTr: Asperger's kids relate better to machines than people. Many are making a great living in Silicon Valley.

MeghanML: it would have to depend on the topic

BrittanyT: You don't want to give an assessment too often if they are studying the same topic. But you also don't want to wait too long if it is a lot of information.

MichelB: at the end or middle of each unit or subject/skill being taught

ShayneTr: Assessment should be on-going. Informal and formal. Observation and marks.

MeghanML: some topics will be more difficult to catch on, and harder for some than others

MeghanML: I agree they should be informal as well as formal

MichelB perfect Shayne

BJB2: an example of an informal assessment?

MichelB: that what I was trying to say you just said it better

MichelB: observation

MichelB: playing a game

ShayneTr: ... and a pat on the back with maybe some positive suggestions thrown in!

ShayneTr: I've always found difficulty with self-assessment, however.

BJB2: self-assessment is difficult for adults!

CeliaCh: Yes, sometimes a pat on the back means your approval

MichelB: I think the students show you a good self- assessment

AndrewJP: I agree

ShayneTr: Not my own kids... they think they keep their room clean

AndrewJP: haha

BJB2: what about differentiating lessons?

MichelB: we do this all the time because one student may not learn like another

ShayneTr: I was also thinking about differentiation (giving students different ways to achieve an outcome eg. visually, hands-on, etc.)

MeghanML: giving them a variety of ways to understand, making sure all the students learn

BJB2: anyone familiar with differentiating? Using graphic organizers is also a way to differentiate

RigoS: it's always good to show them different ways because then they can pick one way that works better for them

ShayneTr: I like Kathie Nunley's Layered Curriculum approach which goes from knowledge to application to critical thinking and analysis. <http://help4teachers.com/>

MichelB: We do a lot of small groups and each group is being taught the same thing just a different way

BrittanyT: I think students should be able to show assessment in many different ways.

BrittanyT: Some may be better at showing what they know visually, orally....etc.

BJB2: special needs students may not be able to do that, Brittany

BJB2: . o O (we all have our strengths and weaknesses)

AndrewJP: Definitely, different students show what they've learned in different ways

MeghanML: I agree

ShayneTr: In my art class, I have non-artists (at least that's what they think) so I've varied my art history project so some students may choose to write about an artist but also giving their own thoughts about the art or drawing in the style of the artist or doing a graphic novel about the artist, etc.

MeghanML: you may have to assess your students differently

BJB2: or using that computer to create a digital story or make a video

BrittanyT: I mean that there can be different opportunities for students to assess.

BJB2 nods to Meghan

ShayneTr: You bet - if the kids put in the effort, so can I!

AndrewJP: That's a great idea Shayne, is that effective?

BJB2: correct, Brittany

ShayneTr: It takes the anxiety away for those who feel they can't draw and gives them a choice. They all have to do research but show it differently.

BJB2: Andrew, I use a similar method in my communication classes

AndrewJP: how so?

MeghanML: I think that's a great way of doing it

BJB2: product based lessons....each student uses his strengths to communicate information learned

RigoS: it's great to give them opportunities to help accomplish their assignments

AndrewJP: gotcha

MeghanML: and helps them to feel good about themselves

MichelB: we give a lot of extra time and re teach a lot for those who need it

RigoS: that's always important Michel

ShayneTr: By the way, on that web-site I mentioned, there are lots of lesson plans for different subjects (some better than others) which teachers contribute, but you'll get some good ideas for differentiating.

MeghanML: thanks

BJB2: thanks, Shayne

CeliaCh: thanks!

BJB2: If we can ever get past the NCLB testing, I think that the direction of education is towards more and more individualized lessons

MichelB: what is that

BJB2: lessons are tailored to fit each individual student

CeliaCh: NCLB stands for?

BJB2: no child left behind, Celia. It's a national education initiative

CeliaCh: I see.

MichelB: oh ya duh

MeghanML: hmmm

ShayneTr: Aren't computers supposed to be good for that? Kids can go through lessons and take self-tests over until they get it. I've never actually tried this.

BJB2: part of the solution would be computers, Shayne

BJB2: lots of canned programs available that do this

BJB2: what would some other solutions be to providing individualized curriculum?

ShayneTr: Do you know a site that would review canned programs to do this?

MichelB: you could work with on focus but let each student pick the topic

BJB2: we've recently gotten Plato, Shayne. That's an example

BJB2: good, Michel

MichelB: you could focus on one unit

MeghanML: yeah

MeghanML: picking a topic is great for students

OmarS: I was in special education in high school

MeghanML: and how was that for you?

CeliaCh: I also wonder.

MichelB: Omar where are you from

OmarS: it was ok. I guess. I was in it for only reading class because I needed help

MeghanML: When I was in 2nd grade I was in special reading classes in Wisconsin...then I moved to Houston and I did fine, it was just the way the teachers were teaching that didn't work for me.

OmarS: This class helped me a lot in high school

MeghanML: and I guess you could classify that as special ed.

OmarS: I agree

ShayneTr: My own kids do learning strategies and are in some applied (as opposed to academic) subjects. I've seen a huge difference in my son's writing ability when a teacher showed him how to structure a thesis and essay.

MeghanML: I had to go through all this testing for learning disabilities, it was very stressful at times

OmarS: Lots of children need help with reading

MeghanML: sometimes teachers just don't teach to all learning styles

MeghanML: I think that's very important

OmarS: Same here

BrittanyT: I remember not being in a special education class, but they would get me out of class for little things. My mom thought I had a speech problem and needed help with it. So the school considered it special ed.

BrittanyT: I hated it because I thought I was not considered special ed. I talk fine and I may talk a little fast but that is not considered special ed.

OmarS: In high school I would take tests in different rooms so teachers could help me a little bit

ShayneTr: BJ, I've been exploring the Plato web-site. Is it an expensive proposition?

BJB2: yes, Shayne

BJB2: they sell site licenses

ShayneTr: oh well. My school is so short of money teachers don't always get paid on time.

BJB2: probably not a good solution for you then

PaulDB joined the room.

MichelB: there's Paul

ShayneTr: Hi Paul!

PaulDB: I apologize for my late arrival.

MichelB: Hi

BJB2: yahoo! Hi, Paul!

BJB2 hopes everything is ok

PaulDB: Yes, pretty much now.

PaulDB: Hello everyone.

BJB2: did you get the severe weather?

MeghanML: Hi Paul

PaulDB: No, just some issues with my middle daughter's impending marriage.

OmarS: Hi Paul

BJB2: this group has been doing a fantastic job of having a discussion on assessment and special ed

PaulDB: Wonderful!!

PaulDB: I am sorry I missed so much.

PaulDB: What is the consensus?

MichelB: that's okay

BJB2: we missed you too!

BJB2 looks around the room to see what the consensus is

PaulDB: So we are still struggling?

PaulDB: What role does assessment play in special education?

BJB2 counts slowly to give extra wait time for responses

RigoS: the progress the y're doing

BJB2: assessment drives the special ed curriculum?

PaulDB: Aside from the pre-referral activities that get the ball rolling.

OmarS: I think special ed is a major concern because lots of children get held back because they can not read or write.

MeghanML: assessments should be done in different ways, to make sure that all learning styles are looked at

OmarS: I agree

CeliaCh: Yes.

PaulDB: Sometimes I think we ask kids to read and write when they are not developmentally ready to do so,

MichelB: I do too

PaulDB: Learning styles can be a bit of a problem though.

AndrewJP: I agree, some students need a little more time to develop their writing skills

BJB2: . o O (same with any skill)

ShayneTr: ... and sometimes we don't ask enough of them or in the right way (learning styles).

MeghanML: exactly

PaulDB: Reading and writing require some rather good fine motor skills and some good eye-hand coordination.

OmarS: that's true

MichelB: by using small groups you should be able to reach each learning style

MeghanML: I agree

AndrewJP: Some teachers can be too narrow in what they expect from their students, that some students don't have the confidence to even write freely

PaulDB: However, remember that the teaching activity must first be focused on achieving an instructional objective.

BJB2: ohhhh.....we didn't discuss instructional objectives ;-(

MichelB: first you focus on the learning objective then you think modify and individualize

PaulDB: The use of task development activities can help identify both possible learning styles as well as deficits in the level of student learning/knowledge.

BJB2: maybe that should be the topic for next month, Paul?

OmarS: Every student should have the best education special ed or not

ShayneTr: Thanks BJ and Paul

BJB2: thanks everyone, for your participation

PaulDB: Okay, I would like to focus on instructional objectives as a way to better frame the assessment process.

MichelB: Thank you I have kids I have to put to bed

BJB2: great, Paul. Thanks

MichelB: Bye

RigoS: bye everyone....thanks for the discussion

CeliaCh: Thanks everyone. Thanks for all your valuable opinions.

PaulDB: Thanks BJ.

AndrewJP: Well I appreciate the discussion everyone. Yall take care

BJB2: no, Omar. The discussion is for people who teach or would like to teach special ed

BJB2: cool, Paul

PaulDB: In fact, Omar, many of the participants are new to teaching or may be in their first year of teaching.

OmarS: cool

PaulDB: In some instances, some of the participants have special education students in their classroom and are seeking help as to how to work with such students.

PaulDB: More importantly, some of the techniques, strategies or resources that are identified in this forum have application beyond the special education population.

BJB2: teachers have to be life-long learners, Omar

PaulDB: What we are trying to do is create a community that meets once a month and try to learn from one another.

PaulDB: There are no single correct answers to the riddle of teaching the diversity of students in the classroom.

OmarS: ok

PaulDB: What we want to do is create a very large skill-set among the teaching staff so that they have the knowledge to be able to modify, adapt, or revise strategies to benefit the students in their classroom.