

**Title of Session:** Special Education Forum

**Moderator:** Paul Bohac

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**BJB2:** Welcome, Jessica and Sheryl, to this month's Special Ed discussion with Paul Bohac.

**BJB2:** As always, let's start with introductions, please...

**BJB2:** I teach remedial communication in Pennsylvania

**JessicaS:** I'm Jessica, a student teacher in Houston and I'm currently in a general ed 2nd grade classroom

**JadeRHB:** I'm a grade 4 teacher in Quebec

**SherylM:** Right now, I work with other teachers in the areas of math and science. I am a parent of a Sophomore, and I have taught since 1975. I was very young. LOL I am not teaching special education right now, but this is a topic of interest. It is one of the most important...I was wondering about trends in the area.

**SherylM:** I live in SE Kansas

**PaulDB:** I am a retired Correctional Education Administrator with a special education background.

**PaulDB:** Now that introductions are completed, let's begin our forum session.

**BJB2** listens eagerly

**SherylM** smiles and nods

**PaulDB:** Is there a topic of particular interest to anyone that should be addressed?

**JessicaS:** none here

**JadeRHB:** I am still interested in assessment that assesses across disciplines

**BJB2:** I think Sheryl has a specific interest

**BJB2** . o O ( related also to assessment, if I recall correctly, Sheryl? )

**SherylM**: I was wondering if the school' curriculum standards and indicators were becoming part of the objectives...and in general what the trends are.

**PaulDB**: All right, let's talk about "trends".

**PaulDB**: In what sense are you asking the question Sheryl?

**SherylM**: It seems to me that many times the indicators of a good curriculum are what you assess for, in the reg class....I wondered if these were being used...maybe on a different grade level or something like that

**PaulDB**: Your suggestion that a good curriculum is related to assessment is quite accurate.

**SherylM**: I know that would only apply to academic subjects...

**PaulDB**: However, that relationship is dependent upon the type of assessment and the purpose of assessment.

**SherylM**: So that is what I am curious about ...

**SherylM**: plus trends in assessment

**PaulDB**: In special education programs there are assessments for social skills development, as there are in other regular education classes.

**SherylM** nods

**PaulDB**: I will go out on a limb and say that assessment should be student oriented first, teacher oriented third and subject/discipline oriented second.

**PaulDB**: For example, a teacher conducts an assessment to determine current level of knowledge or performance of each student in the class.

**PaulDB**: Through that activity, student strengths and weaknesses are identified along a broad continuum.

**PaulDB**: Next, there is an attempt to correlate assessment results against curriculum.

**SherylM**: See, that is what I am wondering...has the regular ed curriculum developed to the point that special ed teachers are using it or....is it like it was when I was doing it...we developed everything from scratch.

**SherylM**: when I say it...I mean the benchmarks, standards and indicators.....or whatever they are called in your state

**JessicaS:** where I'm at, it depends on what level of special ed you are talking about

**SherylM:** the breakdown of the curriculum

**SherylM:** into parts

**PaulDB:** A number of assessments have been developed for use with all students,

**JessicaS:** I've seen resource teachers use the regular ed curriculum for some students, but come up with an entirely new plan for other students

**SherylM** nods

**PaulDB:** Adapting those instruments for specific use with an identified group of spec ed students is a teachers responsibility.

**SherylM** . o O ( that is as I know it )

**PaulDB:** Also, remember that the purpose of special education is to provide the services and assistance needed by the child to be able to achieve maximum benefit from the educational experience.

**PaulDB:** If the intent is to "improve math skills" then the use of an assessment instrument that helps identify what the child knows as well as what the child does not know, then the efforts to "improve math skills" can be defined.

**PaulDB:** What makes it a special education activity are the adaptations, auxiliary services, instructional modifications or other teacher-selected approaches that address the specific and unique needs of the individual child.

**PaulDB:** Consequently, while all fourth grade teachers, for example, will be teaching a specific math curriculum, the method and manner of instruction will vary according to the learner characteristics of the student population.

**PaulDB:** While that sounds reasonable, and certainly appropriate, it is not always happening.

**JessicaS:** because it's harder to do :-)

**PaulDB:** Yes!

**PaulDB:** But in a special education class, there are supposed to be additional resources provided to enable the teacher to make it happen.

**SherylM** . o O ( yes )

**PaulDB:** More importantly, because of the federal and state laws governing special education programs and services, there are mechanisms in place that govern how it is to be accomplished and mechanisms in place to determine how effective the delivery of services,

**PaulDB:** The IEP is the foundation for all special education services.

**PaulDB:** A three-year review (re-evaluation) is conducted to determine the need for continuation of special education services for the child.

**PaulDB:** In truth, if a child can learn in the regular classroom, there is no need for special education services.

**JessicaS:** But what if the child learns at a VERY slow rate..you don't think there should be any intervention?

**PaulDB:** I am a firm believer in intervention.

**PaulDB:** My question would be related to the explanation for the child's slow learning rate.

**JessicaS:** That's where I would start...it could be a number of things, the teacher, their language, they truly have a disability

**PaulDB:** If the child is educationally handicapped, then the rate at which the child learns what is being taught may be appropriate

**JessicaS:** But if that child has no special ed services do you really think it would be watched like it should be?

**PaulDB:** He/she may learn at a slower rate than peers, but on an individual level, the rate may be reasonable.

**PaulDB:** Your question Jessica goes back to the issue of assessment.

**JessicaS:** As time goes by that student would get further and further behind their peers

**SherylM . o O ( 504 plan )**

**JessicaS:** exactly...but that is special services

**JadeRHB:** but with appropriate assessment, intervention occurs sooner and hopefully helps to identify the weakness

**JessicaS:** completely agree with you Jade!

**PaulDB:** Well sorta, 504 plans are not the same as special education services under IDEA.

**SherylM:** sometimes that is the only way to get services for a "slow learner", no matter what our philosophical view.

**JessicaS:** no 504s are not the same, but they will get an IEP which means they will have something extra

**PaulDB:** Yes, that is correct.

**JessicaS:** even if that is only something such as getting a test read to them...but sometimes that is all it takes

**SherylM** agrees

**PaulDB:** I agree.

**PaulDB:** But perhaps if there is a specific area where the child is not performing well, it would be helpful to do a task analysis.

**PaulDB:** That way, you would have a better idea as to the possible explanation of the child's slow rate of learning.

**JessicaS:** I know sometimes, well a lot of the time, different language is used across the country...what do you mean by task analysis?

**PaulDB:** Task analysis is a process for dividing a specific task into its component pieces. For example, in addition problems, the child needs to know numbers, number place, have the skill to perform the task.

**SherylM:** assessment that break down how a child learns a particular task, where are the complicating issues that slow them down....reading speed, decoding issues, etc.

**JessicaS:** k...we're on the same page...thanks

**PaulDB:** Task analysis is another form of assessment.

**SherylM** nods

**JessicaS:** We had a project in one of my classes to do this....it completely amazed me at how many different steps there were to teach someone to do the long jump

**SherylM** smiles and nods

**PaulDB:** How true, but also think about what is involved in "understanding a reading

passage".

**JessicaS:** exactly

**SherylM:** there are assessments used in regular education at critical grade levels that use task analysis...they have a special name...I don't remember at the moment...but I have used them

**PaulDB:** If you have used them, has such use been limited or widespread?

**PaulDB:** My question is related to timing.

**PaulDB:** If such assessments are only administered at critical grade levels, how much time has been lost for learning?

**SherylM:** well, it is a Kansas thing or a regional form of assessment; we are heavy influence by KU, Deshler, et al

**PaulDB:** I guess that is like Florida's FCAT, administered at grades 3, 5, 8, and 10.

**SherylM:** these tests take the better part of a day...

**SherylM:** no these are not state assessments; they are used for instruction

**JessicaS:** Texas is VERY big into standardized testing...which is how we get our curriculum, the TEKS. Each grade level (after K, I'm pretty sure) but only certain years count (3rd grade, 5th grade)

**PaulDB:** I suspect that your special education kids are also involved in the standardized testing program?

**PaulDB:** That is a result of the NCLB Act.

**JuanS:** what do you think about special education students taking on grade level test in Texas?

**SherylM** frowns and nods

**SherylM:** do they have to take a grade level test?

**DavidW:** Paul, I'm curious, is anyone in special education looking at portfolios as an alternative form of assessment?

**JessicaS:** again, depends on services. some students will get the test read to them and have longer time, others are exempt all together, and some get a different test

**PaulDB:** Juan, I think the answer to your question depends on the individual youth and his/her readiness for such testing.

**JessicaS:** please don't get me started on the testing down here :-) way too much is riding on those scores!!!

**PaulDB:** In fact David, there seems to be a growing movement for the use of portfolios in special education programs.

**JuanS:** is anyone a special education teacher?

**JessicaS:** I hope to be...does that count?

**PaulDB:** However, the real strength, from what I can tell, lies in the use of portfolios with special education kids in the lower grades and in the self-contained classroom settings.

**ValareeI** joined the room.

**DavidW** nods

**ValareeI:** can I come in?

**SherylM:** portfolios are very popular for assessment here; especially now with the technological abilities to hold the data

**PaulDB:** Frankly, I think portfolios should be a part of every grade-level and not just for special education youth.

**PaulDB:** Hello Valaree

**BJB2** . o O ( only about 10 minutes left in the discussion, but you're welcome to join us )

**DavidW:** well, yes - just thought that students in special education are going to be disadvantaged by "standardized" tests

**JuanS:** yes Jessica it does you will make a difference in children.

**PaulDB:** And yes, not only can you enter, but feel free to jump right into the discussion!

**JuanS:** yes I agree with you David

**JessicaS:** not only special ed kiddos David, but any child that has a language barrier, different schemes, etc.

**SherylM:** Juan, sorry you missed my intro. I have 12 years of experience teaching

Special Ed and I started teaching in 1975 when I was 4. LOL

**DavidW:** certainly

**PaulDB:** To make it so, David, I think there will need to be acknowledgement that portfolios are a viable "alternative assessment" in the context of the standardized testing scenario.

**JessicaS:** Yes!

**DavidW** nods

**SherylM:** One issue to be dealt with is inter-rater reliability

**PaulDB:** Okay, let's go back to the methods used to measure performance.

**PaulDB:** A paper-pencil test is but one method, it is not the only method.

**JessicaS:** rubrics, observations, anecdotal records, standardized test

**PaulDB:** It is predicated on a presumption that there is one answer.

**PaulDB:** Yes, Jessica, you have included several of the "alternatives" that could be generated to provide for inter-rater reliability.

**BJB2** looks at the clock on the wall

**SherylM:** The 6 trait method of writing and its assessment rubric is an example of a well documented successful alternative assessment. Thanks to the people at NWREL

**SherylM:** thanks Paul

**BJB2:** The next SPED discussion is October 15

**SherylM:** Nice to talk with everyone

**JessicaS:** hmmm...never heard of that, I'll have to look it up. Thanks Sheryl

**JadeRHB:** thanks

**BJB2:** please come back and continue this excellent discussion!

**BJB2:** Thanks, Paul, for leading the discussion

**JessicaS:** yes, thanks everyone!

**SherylM**: <http://www.nwrel.org/index.php>

**JessicaS**: awesome!

**SherylM**: start there Jessica

**JuanS**: thanks

**PaulDB**: Yes, NWREL is a veritable fountain of information not only about testing but also how to use technology in the classroom.

**SherylM** nods

**DavidW**: <http://www.thetraits.org/>

**SherylM**: cool; thanks didn't have that one at hand

**JessicaS**: great guys...thanks so much

**DavidW** smiles

**DavidW**: welcome, Sheryl

**PaulDB**: I have enjoyed this session and hope we can continue next month.

**SherylM** nods

**JessicaS**: bye!

**DavidW**: Thanks, Paul - good discussion

**JuanS**: are there any helpful websites?

**SherylM**: yes,

**PaulDB**: Thanks to everyone for your participation!

**JadeRHB** left the room.

**PaulDB**: David, isn't it [www.nwrel.org?](http://www.nwrel.org/)

**DavidW**: yes, it is, Paul, but they seem to have set up another web site specifically for the 6 + 1 traits for writing

**DavidW**: <http://www.thetraits.org/>

**PaulDB:** I don't have the web site address in front of me so I may be wrong.

**BJB2:** <http://www.nwrel.org/assessment/>

**PaulDB:** I guess I was wrong!

**JuanS:** thanks

**PaulDB:** Thanks BJ and David.

**DavidW:** couple of different ways of getting there

**SherylM:** their website has changed dramatically over the past two years

**DavidW** smiles

**PaulDB:** I didn't realize it had been that long since I was there.

**DavidW** smiles

**SherylM** nods and agrees

**SherylM** . o O ( know the feeling )

**PaulDB:** Well, that's what happens when you retire and change focus of work.

**SherylM:** Well, I'm outta here. Thanks Paul.....Everyone have a great evening

**PaulDB:** Good night everyone, I look forward to next month!