

Title of Session: Special Education Forum

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Room: Special Education Forum Group

BJB2: Welcome to this month's Special Ed discussion, everyone!

JeffC waves

BJB2: we usually start all Tapped In discussions with introductions. Please let Paul know where you are located and what you teach or hope to teach

BJB2: I teach remedial communication to juveniles in a correctional facility in Pennsylvania

KellyJM: I am student teaching in Houston. I attend the University of Houston

PaulDB: I am a retired Correctional Education Administrator with a background in Special Education.

LienMP: I am University of Houston, Texas

BJB2: what grade/level do you hope to teach, Kelly?

BJB2: and you, Lien?

BJB2: Paul, there was some nice activity on the discussion board this month!

KellyJM: either Kinder or first

LienMP: Currently student teach in 6th grade math class

PaulDB: Yes there was BJ, I am wondering how it turned out.

BJB2: do you have any special ed classes in your curriculum, Kelly and Lien?

LienMP: No, I don't have one

KellyJM: one

LienMP: I am in an on level and high average class

PaulDB: So this may be a learning experience for both of you?

LienMP: good

KellyJM: yes

PaulDB: I must confess, I do not have much direct experience with k-1 grade programs so all of us may be learning something new this evening!

BJB2: Paul, think Lien and Kelly will experience special needs kids in their teaching careers?

LienMP: Yes, I will soon

PaulDB: O certainly. One of the issues they will confront is the increase in the number of autistic kids.

BJB2 nods to Paul

PaulDB: Not to mention an increase in the number of kids with fetal alcohol syndrome and birth complications arising from parental drug abuse during pregnancy.

BJB2: I thought the number of fetal alcohol syndrome babies was dropping?

PaulDB: Not identified as "special education" youth or covered under IDEA, but a significant population of school-aged kids requiring teacher and teaching adaptations.

LienMP: How can we deal with those kids?

BJB2 assumes Lien and Kelly know about differentiated lessons?

PaulDB: No, not dropping but maybe stabilizing to some extent. Of course, when talking about hundreds of thousands of kids, what's a few thousand?

KellyJM: yes

BJB2 nods sadly to Paul

LienMP: yes

LienMP: Is modify lesson for those kids work?

PaulDB: If you have some knowledge of differentiated lessons, then you have been exposed to the concept of teacher adaptations.

KellyJM: yes, but are there any specifics about how to deal with kids with certain disabilities

LienMP: Yes, but I did not have a chance to actually use it in the classroom.

PaulDB: It is a modifying of lesson and assigned student work, but it also includes development and use of good assessment activities.

KellyJM: ok

LienMP: What kind of assessment can we use with those kids?

PaulDB: There are various descriptions of the learner characteristics according to a youth's identified educational handicap.

PaulDB: Knowing something about learner characteristics is important in order to develop appropriate assessment activities.

PaulDB: The other part of that picture is knowing what the instructional objectives to be achieved include.

PaulDB: For example, 1st grade kids are involved in learning what sounds are related to which letters and how a group of letters form a word.

PaulDB: One assessment activity would include the use of a list of letters that students are to identify by name and sound.

PaulDB: Here is where a knowledge of learner characteristics comes into play, certain letter sound productions are related to student age and physical development. Asking a kid to identify a letter may be appropriate, but asking the child to produce the letter sound may not be possible.

LienMP: I agree.

KellyJM: So basically you need to research the child's handicap in order to be able to meet their best needs

PaulDB: Lien is working with math, and she may develop an assessment that determines what a child has learned from previous classes. But she has to be careful that she looks at the student's work and not just the student's answer.

BJB2: how would Lien and Kelly know to recognize red flags of a disability?

PaulDB: Good description Kelly!

LienMP: That is true because each student is different

KellyJM: ok makes sense

PaulDB: One way is to talk with a special education teacher, another is to obtain a copy of the Texas Special Education Plan.

LienMP: I think through classroom observation or the students work.

KellyJM: sounds good

PaulDB: Classroom observation is good, but a frame of reference is needed to interpret what is being observed.

LienMP: yes

PaulDB: There are also web-based resources that can provide a comprehensive list of learner characteristics by exceptionality.

KellyJM: do you know any of the top of your head

PaulDB: CEC has a very good reference web site as does the US Office of Education.

PaulDB: I have to look up both of those web site addresses, I do not know them off the top of my head.

BJB2: they are probably listed under featured items on the web window of this room

KellyJM: ok well those are a good start

PaulDB: Thanks BJ!

BJB2: <http://www.cec.sped.org/>

KellyJM: oh wow thanks

LienMP: Does the special edu. kids that to take the state test?

PaulDB: Classroom observation is also a good source of information related to the development of assessments.

PaulDB: Good question Lien

PaulDB: In some instances in some states yes, in other instances in other state maybe.

PaulDB: NCLB has imposed additional testing requirements that include special education kids as a part of a school, a school district and/or a school system testing population.

LienMP: Really, that seems to be unfair for those kids that they have to take the test.

PaulDB: Remember, assessment is student-oriented to facilitate student performance improvement, testing is a measurement of group performance.

PaulDB: I agree with you Lien, but the law is the law.

KellyJM: That seems like it could be very stressful for some of those students

PaulDB: Which is one of the reasons I am so strong on the use of assessment to help kids prepare for and demonstrate performance on the test.

PaulDB: The instructional objectives to be achieved should guide the assessment activities.

LienMP: Does it take the special ed. kids longer to learn something new than the regular kids?

KellyJM: their objectives may be different than the rest of the class though, right?

PaulDB: For example, every state testing program has a list of vocabulary words that kids are to define, or use in context, or to include in a sentence.

PaulDB: Actually Kelly, there are two (at least) different instructional objectives: one is the teacher's instructional objective reflecting what is happening in the class on a day-to-day basis. The other is the State's instructional objective that defines what a 3rd grader should be able to do at the end of the school year.

KellyJM: right, so the spec. ed. kids are expected to meet the same objectives as the rest of their peers

PaulDB: Hopefully, you will be given a list of the State's objectives at the start of the school year. From that you can develop specific instructional objectives related to the classroom instructional plan that you develop.

MarianaA joined the room.

PaulDB: They are unless there is something in the spec ed's IEP referencing an alternative objective.

KellyJM: oh ok

LienMP: ok

PaulDB: For example, All 3rd graders are expected to be able to demonstrate the ability to read. While there may be "accommodations" provided (extended time to take the test,

test-taking in a separate room, etc.), the measurement of reading performance must be provided.

KellyJM: ok that makes more sense

PaulDB: For some kids, reading demonstration may be "orally" rather than "silently" measured.

PaulDB: Again, this goes back to learner characteristics.

KellyJM: right

PaulDB: The problem is that the IEP may not include the accommodations and the youth is expected to perform at the same level as age-grade level peers.

JeffC: I've always wondered how that is supposed to magically happen.

KellyJM: wow that's a lot to ask

LienMP: I think it will be hard for those special edu students who needed the accommodations.

PaulDB: Here is where classroom observations can be useful. A child who is fidgety in his/her seat, may also be a child who is more capable when the performance involves large, rather than small muscle groups.

PaulDB: If you have observed that, you make a note of that and when the IEP is being developed you can introduce that observation into the discussion.

LienMP: That is a very good way to help those kids.

PaulDB: Maybe now would be a good time to suggest that you learn something about your state's Child Find procedures.

KellyJM: therefore when it comes to test time hopefully they will have the modifications that they need

PaulDB: Those are procedures to be followed if you suspect that a child in your classroom may be eligible for special education services.

PaulDB: Modifications will only be approved if there is a demonstrated need for such.

PaulDB: Learner characteristics, classroom observations and both assessments and evaluations help define the need for such.

PaulDB: As teachers, our objective is to help kids learn how to learn. During the first

three grades, the focus is on learning how to read. After the third grade, the focus is on reading to learn.

PaulDB: Problem is, not every kid will be ready to learn to read when s/he enters school.

LienMP: That is why it place on the teacher shoulder to teach the kids to learn how to read.

MarianaA: I teach high school and I have many students who are not reading at grade level. It's difficult to play catch up in high school.

PaulDB: Some kids may never develop the level of reading skills needed because of processing difficulties (LD kids), because of limited mental capacity (EMH kids), an inability to attend to the learning task (EH kids) or because of a simple lack of motivation.

PaulDB: You are so right Mariana!!

LienMP: Yes, I'm in a sixth grade class and I saw many kids are very behind and they face many difficulties.

BJB2 wonders how kids make it to high school if they are not on grade level?

PaulDB: The issue becomes one of helping kids learn how to learn. I buy books to learn, others buy audio tapes they listen to to learn, still others watch others and learn through direct observation.

BJB2 . o O (rhetorical question :-)

BJB2 looks at the clock on the wall

MarianaA: That's what we always ask ourselves. Most of us start with the basics but many teachers just leave them behind and work with grade level students.

BJB2: The next SPED discussion will be December 17, right, Paul?

PaulDB: Learner characteristics, both the state's and the teacher's instructional objectives, coupled with classroom observations are all necessary for good assessments.

PaulDB: Yes BJ, December 17, 2007.

BJB2: Thanks for another brilliant discussion, Paul!

MarianaA: Thank you.

LienMP: Than You!

PaulDB: This has been fun!

KellyJM: thanks

PaulDB: I hope you all have benefited from participation.

KellyJM: for sure

PaulDB: If you have, tell your friends and colleagues so maybe they will join us next time!!

MarianaA: Thanks for the great websites.

PaulDB: Mariana, what subject do you teach?

MarianaA: I teach Spanish and ELD.

PaulDB: ELD?

MarianaA: English Language Development

PaulDB: What an interesting combination instructional assignment!

PaulDB: Do you have many bi-lingual students in your class?

MarianaA: Well we have a large Hispanic population and I am the only who speaks Spanish at the school.

MarianaA: Yes. I teach Heritage Spanish.

MarianaA: These students are also in the ELD class.