

Title of Session: Special Education Forum

Moderator: Paul Bohac

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Room: Special Education Forum Group

BjB: Paul should be here soon. The discussion is scheduled to start in about 4 minutes

EricW: Great, I'm attending graduate courses at California San Marcos...I have some experience in Special Education.

EricW: California State University of San Marcos I mean...

BjB: excellent, Eric.

DavidJC: I teach special education in Culver City and attend Cal State LA

BjB: great, David!

BjB: . o O (if Paul doesn't log in you guys can lead the discussion ;-))

BjB: what about you, Kristina?

EricW: That's cool, David...

DavidJC: thanks

KristinaK: I do not teach special education, but I am very interested in becoming special ed certified

KristinaK: I am currently a student teacher here in Texas

BjB: cool, Kristina

BjB: I am a retired communication and art teacher....I taught in a male juvenile correctional facility

PaulDB joined the room.

BjB cheers...and here's Paul!

BjB: We've just done intros, Paul...you have some great participants today

PaulDB: Telephone call with youngest daughter delayed me.

BjB : I'll announce and then we can get started...

BjB : Kristina, David and Eric, ignore the announcement. You're in the right place

EricW: Thanks.

KristinaK: thanks

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

PaulDB: Sounds good

BjB : Paul, would you like everyone to re-introduce themselves?

PaulDB: So, does someone have a burning issue to discuss?

PaulDB: No, I'll pick up as the session progresses.

EricW: I used to be a Youth Mentor for At-Risk Gang Members in San Diego...

BjB nods to Paul

EricW: Now I teach K-5 elementary school

PaulDB: Good background experience for your current work Eric!

EricW: It's been an amazing ride...

PaulDB: Seriously, is there an issue that a participant wants to address?

BjB : gangs?

EricW: I was just sharing...

PaulDB: I would bet you have a different perspective about classroom management problems as a result of your prior work with gangs.

EricW: I'll talk about any issues around Special Ed.

EricW: Paul, my classroom management has grown so much.

PaulDB: I would like to talk about classrooms with more than one type of special ed youth assigned.

EricW: Sounds great to me....

KristinaK: great

DavidJC: okay

PaulDB: The push to develop "inclusion" classrooms often times has a teacher at a disadvantage.

PaulDB: Trying to accommodate the requirements of several different IEP's can be difficult.

DavidJC: yes, I agree

PaulDB: The approach that seems to work best in that situation is to find areas of commonality among the students.

PaulDB: For example, youth who need special help in reading can be hard for a teacher.

PaulDB: Working in small groups can help alleviate the problems.

PaulDB: Do any of you use small group instruction?

EricW: I do Paul.

DavidJC: yeah, I use it in social studies and am starting to use it to target skill areas in math

KristinaK: yes

PaulDB: How do you create a group?

KristinaK: in the classrooms I have worked in small groups are always used during reading, and math

EricW: In my the mainstream classes I've taught we do small group instruction and we do it in Special Education too.

PaulDB: Are there any special factors that you consider when assigning students to a group?

KristinaK: I have always seen ability level grouping so that students who are all on the same level work together so as not to get frustrated

DavidJC: I have to make sure that students will not interfere with each others learning

PaulDB: Great Kristina!

EricW: Usually I group students by reading or learning levels.

PaulDB: Now how do you define a group's "ability level?"

DavidJC: I try to mix up groups....sometimes students who work at the same pace and other times it will be heterogeneous

PaulDB: What I am asking is not what test is used to define ability but rather what other aspects are also considered?

EricW: I like to pair fast learners with slower learners.

PaulDB: David, you seem to be using a student centered, subject matter approach.

PaulDB: Eric, you seem to be using a peer-to-peer approach.

PaulDB: Do your respective approaches produce the kinds of student learning you seek?

DavidJC: To tell you the truth, I use small groups because it is the only way I find that I can get through the curriculum that I have to get through while also working on skills

EricW: Yes, because I want them work together.

PaulDB: This is not a test, I am trying to generate some discussion about how to structure small groups.

EricW: That's so true David!

KristinaK: today, my teacher changed around her guided reading groups because the children started advancing at a different pace

PaulDB: Yes, it is so true.

KristinaK: instead of keeping them stuck in the same group all year, she moves them around in order to work with other students and learn from each other

PaulDB: Kristina, what is it about the change in pace noticed by the teacher?

EricW: I use small groups mostly to find out what my students don't understand.

PaulDB: How do you do that Eric?

KristinaK: their comprehension in reading mostly

PaulDB: What kind of classroom preparation do you go through to help learn what your students don't understand?

DavidW joined the room.

DavidW waves and apologizes for showing up late

PaulDB: What aspect of comprehension Kristina?

EricW: I will meet with about 5-8 students at a time. My fast learners will work independently 1st, and I will meet with those that need help 1st.

PaulDB: Hello David

DavidW: Hi, Paul

KristinaK: right now they are reading short chapter books if they are in the higher ability groups, and they have to write summaries and focus on the main idea (this is 1st grade) and the lower groups are working on what it means to be a good reader

PaulDB: So you have an instructional objective to be achieved and a lesson that address the objective. You conduct the class, deliver the lesson assign seatwork and then monitor performance.

KristinaK: i.e. looking at the pictures, sounding out the words they don't know

EricW: Of course Paul...But finding the seatwork is the hardest part for me.

EricW: Kids with special needs require a lot of one-on-one attention.

KristinaK: I don't know about the upper grades, but at the school I am at right now there are special ed aides that alternate between students and stay with the special needs students so that they are never alone

PaulDB: Students who demonstrate the skills related to the instructional task are then encouraged to complete additional assignments while those who are experiencing difficulty are provided additional help. Am I correct Kristina?

KristinaK: yes, Paul

EricW: I long-term subbed for 3 months last Spring in Special Education 1-3 level.

PaulDB: How is that similar to what you do Eric?

EricW: There were 4 Teacher's Aides in the class.

EricW: I'm a long-term K-5 school-site sub, so I see a variety of students.

EricW: Special Needs children require more attention, but they also do seatwork.

EricW: Do you have any suggestions?

PaulDB: The attention that special education kids need is the element I am hoping to touch upon tonight.

DavidJC: I struggle with how to group students so that they can be productive semi-independently, when I have several students who make it difficult for others to get their work done

PaulDB: For example, Kristina described a change in a reading group based on developing skills by some students but not by other students.

EricW: Distractions!

PaulDB: Distractions are always present, it is how we as teachers respond that makes a difference.

EricW: So True!

KaylaV joined the room.

PaulDB: For the teacher to identify changes in student performance, a clearly defined instructional objective was compared against performance.

PaulDB: Hello Kayla

KaylaV: Hello, just joining the conversation. I will watch for a bit while I get dinner cooking.

PaulDB: What I am curious about is the level of performance.

PaulDB: More specifically, how was the performance level defined?

KristinaK: do you mean by the IEP?

EricW: Where I teach, the GOVT decides our school's performance levels.

PaulDB: It is the definition of performance that should be a criteria for assignment to a group.

PaulDB: The IEP includes goals to be achieved, the teacher selects the instructional objectives to be taught to help achieve the goals.

PaulDB: For example, the IEP goal may be to achieve grade-level reading performance by the end of the school year.

DavidJC: So, you are saying that we need to clearly define levels of performance for groupings, so that they are not so arbitrary.

PaulDB: The teacher looks at the state-mandated reading objectives for the specific school grade and then selects the instructional objectives appropriate to the reading curriculum.

EricW: Correct.

EricW: Then those goals are included in the IEP.

KristinaK: but these goals must also be reasonable. I think sometimes as new teachers (and I am speaking of myself here) we want to push our students so hard that we lose sight of reasonable and achievable goals.

PaulDB: After the teacher identifies the instructional objectives, then develops lesson plans consistent with the objective, the method of delivering the lesson plan becomes the next step in the planning process.

KaylaV: In Louisiana we have 3 groupings that I think you are talking about. Some students are tested on the same material but an abbreviated form of the test. So their objects are more about HOW they learn ie. acquire information gathering skills...in order to achieve grade level expectations

EricW: The Planning Process makes a difference.

EricW: I struggle there...

PaulDB: I think small groups should be created for the purpose of facilitating student learning.

PaulDB: In that context, small group instruction does require considerable pre-planning.

KristinaK: and great classroom management. because while you are with the small group there has to be something planned for all the other students to be working on to keep them on task

PaulDB: Kayla, you have identified why I think small group instruction can be so valuable!

EricW: Very True Kristina.

KaylaV: Small groups work if you have other activities they like, like computers and reading and maybe an extra adult in the room to roam from group to group.

PaulDB: Here again Kristina, the selection of the instructional objective becomes important. Every class is already divided into small groups whether the teacher does so overtly or otherwise.

EricW: Exactly Kayla....

PaulDB: As teachers we look around the room and group our students according to some type of criteria, whether it is behavior, academic performance or some other factor.

KaylaV: The problem I see in some classrooms is the able students are in one group and the low students know they are the low group and have a hard [time] accomplishing their tasks. Or if grouped in mixed groups, the able students take over sometimes. Difficult to balance.

DavidJC: I agree

KaylaV: Probably best to mix it up all the time.

KristinaK: right, I've already seen competitiveness in a few kindergarteners who want to be in the higher group

EricW: Can't you change the names of the groups? How old are the kids?

PaulDB: The process of changing that habit into an instructional approach that we use almost every day simply allows us to be more open.

PaulDB: Forming a group out of the students in your classroom should always be for the purpose of promoting learning.

KristinaK: hah, it was the second day of doing it. and they have color names for the groups

KaylaV: the groups aren't named, Kids are smart and figure it out. Back to the objectives...

EricW: Agreed...

PaulDB: So any group you form should include all three types of students: good ones, not so good ones and those who are struggling.

KaylaV: I like that best. and the groups are not static, they change, so you can address the Objectives of an IEP in different settings and with different students.

DavidJC: So, in perhaps a social studies lesson (small group reading), one group is working on summarizing, another group finding the main idea, while another group is finding key details.

PaulDB: Think of it this way, we want our students to be able to function as adults. As adults, we know what it is to help one another, kids will learn how to do that if we provide them with an opportunity to develop that skill.

EricW: How do we provide them with that opportunity?

PaulDB: Yes and yes to Kayla and David.

EricW: Especially when funding is low....

PaulDB: Groups should have the opportunity to develop some cohesion but not at the expense of separation.

PaulDB: By creating core groups and then adding different members from time to time according to task, kids learn that they can achieve.

PaulDB: I seem to be having a problem with my connection!

PaulDB left the room (signed off).

BjB: we just have a few more minutes...let's see if Paul returns

KaylaV: In a science training we went to they suggested providing five jobs to each group, Note taker, leader, supplies, data and tester. The group works together 5 times, maybe over a week, or one day, and each has to change jobs each time, rotating until everyone has a turn, then the groups are changed.

BjB: have you had a chance to try that, Kayla?

DavidW: I think that's a good approach for any kind of group learning, Kayla

DavidJC: I have tried that kind of thing before.

BjB: how did it work, David?

EricW: Small groups are best, but sometimes there are too many students in Middle and High School classes.

DavidJC: It worked much better than just putting the kids into a group and telling them to get started.

PaulDB joined the room.

KaylaV: We had to do it ourselves, in the training and I heard my daughter's science teacher does it in middle school and it works well. I'm guessing it would be more difficult for 3rd graders but with practice...

DavidW: . o O (just make more groups?)

BjB: wb, Paul

PaulDB: My system had a malfunction!

EricW: We have 20:1 ratio for grades 1-2, but not grades 3-5.

DavidW smiles

BjB: better now?

DavidW: Good job overcoming it, Paul

BjB: sometimes using 'stations' for small groups works

PaulDB: I hope so, but really regret having lost the discussion thread.

EricW: I like that idea **BjB**.

BjB: . o O (plus, it gives you the opportunity to use multidisciplinary lessons...like art and music)

PaulDB: Stations are an excellent idea. Helps to organize the classroom and breaks up the monotony of a single environment.

PaulDB: Also contributes to small group instruction that is conducive to good classroom management.

KaylaV: Younger students do better with stations because the noise level is different according to the activity.

BjB looks at the clock on the wall. The next SPED discussion will be on November 10

KaylaV: I agree with you Paul, it really looks great when your classroom is observed and they are actively learning in groups

BjB: I hope that you all will return to continue this discussion...then we'll be SUSTAINING learning!

KaylaV: I've enjoyed this discussion!

PaulDB: I am sorry for the computer malfunction folks.

KristinaK: thanks for the discussion

DavidJC: Thanks for the discussion.

DavidW: happens to the best of us, Paul

EricW: We still received a lot of important information.

DavidJC: Bye

BJB: Paul, you did a wonderful job and were gone only a minute or so

EricW: Thanks for the discussion.

PaulDB: Please, let's all reconvene next month and continue this discussion!!

BJB: thanks, everyone for your participation

KaylaV: I will mark my calendar.

BJB: thanks, Paul...brain food as always!

PaulDB: Yes, thank you for joining this evening. I have enjoyed it immensely!

PaulDB: Thank you BJ, I don't know what happened.

BJB: like David said, it happens to us all from time to time

PaulDB: Eric, working with gangs must have been an experience.

EricW: Take Care.

BJB: . o O (burp in the system is always my excuse)

DavidW: smles

PaulDB: I like that BJ, will remember to use it should it ever happen in the future.

BJB: waves goodnight.

PaulDB: Good night!

DavidW: Thanks, Paul...nice group tonight

