

Title of Session: Special Education Forum - Inclusion

Moderator: Paul Bohac

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BjB: I did publicize this chat, but forgot to post to the group room discussion board this month, Paul

BjB: I took the information you shared about inclusion and made that the topic for Feb.

PaulDB: Good. I have also been doing some research into alternative ed and the high incidence of special education kids who seem to be enrolling in or being placed in alternative education.

BjB: is this a good thing or a bad thing?

PaulDB: I am beginning to believe that the inclusion route is one way to reduce the numbers of dropouts among both the special ed and the at-risk population.

BjB: and how do you define inclusion?

PaulDB: The studies I have been reading suggest that special ed kids seem to fare better in alternative ed settings.

BjB: how do you define an 'alternative ed' setting?

PaulDB: In this context, inclusion refers to the involvement of spec ed kids in regular classrooms alongside non-spec ed kids.

BjB: I agree about inclusion.

PaulDB: Defining Alternative ed settings is a little more difficult. Essentially there seem to be two strands of thought as to the definition.

BjB listens

PaulDB: One strand sees alt ed as what the name implies, educational programs that are different from the typical public school programming.

BjB: alt ed can also refer to gifted...or something like a charter school

BjB . o O (where emphasis would be on learning through the arts for example)

PaulDB: The other seems to identify alt ed according to the means of student enrollment. A

student enters the program by choice, in which case the education program is more individualized.

PaulDB: Not in the sense that the student's participation is strictly one of choice but rather that the education is designed to help the student achieve a stated personal goal.

BjB: who constructs the education design?

PaulDB: However, if a student is enrolled in an alt ed program by assignment, then the focus is divided between academic and more social objectives. This would include the "second chance" or "last chance" schools.

BjB still thinks IEPs are lost opportunities...they should be more collaborative and include the student

PaulDB: You are so right!!

BjB nods about the social issue

PaulDB: IEP's offer both the student and the school the opportunity to merge in a common effort for the benefit of both the student and the school.

BjB: I watched the HBO movie on Temple Grandin on Saturday...fabulous!

PaulDB: I missed it.

BjB agrees in principle to the IEP, but don't think it's really done in practice

PaulDB: The RTI movement grew out of a realization that the IEP's were not achieving their intended objective.

JeffC joined the room.

PaulDB: Hello Jeff!

BjB: when I was teaching, the student was usually in the room to participate in the IEP...and the parents were absent

JeffC waves (was just helping a teacher set up a class)

BjB waves hi to Jeff

BjB: we're discussing Inclusion, Jeff

JeffC: nothing like parental involvement, bj!

BjB . o O (and IEPs and alternative ed)

BjB: sometimes, Jeff

JeffC thinks all students should have ILPs from Day 1, electronic portfolios, and free cupcakes!

BjB: sometimes the parent is the reason the kid is the way they are!

PaulDB: Again, you have touched on one of the reasons alt ed programs are expanding.

JeffC: there ya go again, blaming parents, when we all know that it's the penguins we should blame

BjB winks at Jeff....not the Polar Bears and global warming?

PaulDB: Well, it is a bit more than just the parents, sometimes the schools do a poor job of accommodating kids.

BjB: it's always more than just one reason, Paul....as you mentioned, it is social, emotional, academic

PaulDB: One issue that caught me was that kids who are retained because of poor academic performance on a high stakes test (NCLB-related) seemed more inclined to further reduce their academic efforts.

PaulDB: They question the value of continuing in school and distrust the school as a source of help in terms of their future.

JeffC: makes sense to me

PaulDB: Here is a figure that stopped me cold: 3.8 million kids between 16 and 25 are not attending school, are without a high school diploma, and are unemployed as of 2005. Think what it must be today!

JeffC: I have to go afk... I totally got into teaching because school sux... and it still does

BjB: I think several studies support the idea that retention encourages drop outs

PaulDB: One in four students will drop out and 40% of that group are special education students.

BjB: how sad!

PaulDB: The drop out rate has increased every year since 1969.

BjB: sounds like a broken system for sure!

PaulDB: Where I think inclusion can have the greatest impact is with those students who are identified as spec ed being given the opportunity to come along with non-spec ed kids while the teacher works to ensure that every student in the class learns how to learn.

PaulDB: RTI may offer a way to generate a change in teaching but only if the teachers are receptive.

BjB: sounds ideal, but does the teacher have the time to do this? Are classes too large for that individualization?

PaulDB: However, rather than a "process", RTI is being presented as a requirement.

PaulDB: Individualized instruction does not mean individualized isolation.

BjB: uh oh....that should have about as much success as requiring teachers to use technology

PaulDB: It is the "requirement" that becomes the elephant in the room!!!

BjB nods sadly.

PaulDB: Those of us who see teaching as both an art and a science know that teachers are overwhelmed by daily demands.

BjB: lots of 'requirements' and not much opportunity for implementation

PaulDB: Rather than "add to" we ought to be "taking away" whenever we impose something new.

BjB: in an ideal world ;-)

PaulDB: Dr. Platt and I will be meeting with the local community college later on this month.

BjB listens

PaulDB: Our meeting is intended to introduce the alternative/special education Master's program at UWF.

HaleyT joined the room.

BjB . o O (paperwork was one of the obstacles you mentioned to inclusion)

BjB cheers...welcome back, Haley

BjB: you're welcome to listen...we just were trying to include you in the discussion...

BjB . o O (especially since the discussion is about inclusion!)

PaulDB: The Master's includes teaching teachers how to teach the at-risk and special education students in an inclusion classroom.

HaleyT: still trying to figure everything out

BjB: Haley, can you please tell us where you are located and what you teach? Paul is leading the discussion.

BjB: you are in a special ed classroom, Haley? Does the school use inclusion for sped students?

BjB . o O (don't worry about figuring everything out, Haley...we'll help you if you have questions)

HaleyT: I work in an elementary school in the autism classroom in VA, yes we use inclusion

BjB: I was telling Paul that I watched the HBO special on Temple Grandin on Saturday...very good

BjB . o O (I had read a couple of her books)

PaulDB: Do you work with autistic kids and bring in non-autistic students during the day
HaleyT?

HaleyT: I thought it was great

SusanR joined the room.

BjB waves hi to Sue

SusanR: Hi Bj and company

PaulDB: Or do your students leave your class and go to other classes?

SusanR listens

PaulDB: Hello Susan!

HaleyT: students leave with me to attend "regular ed " classes and specials

BjB: the topic today is inclusion, Sue...and alternative ed

PaulDB: So you accompany them to the other classes and serve as a resource teacher in those other classes for your students?

HaleyT: yes

PaulDB: How much time do you have to coordinate, or help develop common lesson plans?

HaleyT: mostly I have to modify the lessons

PaulDB: I suspect there is a common curriculum in your school so modifications are oriented towards instructional strategies rather than subject matter?

PaulDB: I make a distinction between strategies and content. The former referring to how the material is presented and the latter refers to the material being covered.

HaleyT: yes, each child is different so how I present the lesson is different for each student

PaulDB: How many students are assigned to your class?

HaleyT: 7

PaulDB: How many classes do you take your students to during a normal day?

HaleyT: 2 regular ed classes like science or social studies and all specials, which they tend to enjoy more

SusanR . o O (sounds like our spec ed model)

PaulDB: Social skills are an important part of your programming I would think. Do you find that student enjoyment in a particular class contributes to a good day or does it create some difficulties when students have to leave?

PaulDB: I ask this because I have never worked with a group of autistic students and do not know anything about the group dynamics.

HaleyT: no it helps to get them to "go" to a particular class

BjB: can you explain that a little more, Haley?

PaulDB: So a good experience creates the potential for further engagement. A form of "intrinsic" motivation?

HaleyT: a lot of autistic students want to do what they want, when they want to do it and it is often my job to convince them to do what the "school" wants them to do

HaleyT: You might say "first science" then they can have or do what they want

PaulDB: So the classes they enjoy are like "rewards" for doing what others want them to do?

HaleyT: yes letting them do an activity in our classroom can be a reward

PaulDB: There must be good relations between students and staff in these other classes.

HaleyT: yes there is

BjB looks at the clock on the wall

BjB: Paul, do you want to continue this topic for March?

PaulDB: Students who feel welcome in a classroom will enjoy being there.

PaulDB: Yes I do. I think we have just scratched the surface tonight.

BjB agrees!

BjB: The next Special Ed Forum will be on March 8

BjB: I hope you will be able to join us, Haley

HaleyT: me too

PaulDB: Haley, I hope you will join us next month, there is much we can learn from you regarding efforts to work with autistic children!

BjB agrees....I enjoyed having your input, Haley

HaleyT: thanks

BjB: any last comments, Paul?

BjB: Haley, you will automatically be emailed a transcript of your text chat when you log out

HaleyT: this was my first time on Tapped In and I think I did it wrong to sorry if I didn't do it right

BjB: you did fine :-) You just missed the first part of the discussion till you figured it out

PaulDB: RTI, inclusion, alternative education are all related, they each are good topics, collectively they offer a real opportunity to help kids.

PaulDB: I look forward to next month (unless global warming interferes).

PaulDB: That was for your benefit Jeff.

BjB chuckles

BjB waves goodnight. Stay warm and dry, Paul!

HaleyT left the room (signed off).

PaulDB: Thank you all for this evening. It has been enjoyable and I learned something about a topic with which I have only limited knowledge and I am grateful!