

Title of Session: Special Education Forum

Moderator: Paul Bohac

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Room: Special Education Forum Group

PaulDB: Looks like a good group tonight!!

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

BJB2: Hi, Paul. I teach communication and am located in Pennsylvania

NicoleLE: Houston, TX 2rd or 3rd grade, currently student teaching with third

AmandaGT: Hello! My name is Amanda and I am from Houston, TX. I will be a 3rd grade bilingual teacher next school year. I am currently a student teacher.

KaytanaB: Hi Paul, I teach 4-8 Science and I am located in Houston, TX

VivianEM: I am located in Houston Texas, I am currently doing my student teaching and already got a job to teach Kindergarten

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

KaylaP: Hello Paul, I am a student teacher at Bear Creek Elementary in Katy, Texas.

MayraF: Hello, I'm Mayra, from Houston. I'm currently student teaching 7th grade math

PaulDB: So how many of you work with an identified special education population in an inclusion setting?

KaylaP: I do

KaytanaB: I do

VivianEM: I do

AmandaGT: I do too

NicoleLE: same here

MayraF: I haven't worked in a setting like that but I'm interested in learning

PaulDB: I am also teaching a course called "diversity" for the local community college to help prepare future teachers.

KaylaP: That is interesting!

VivianEM: Interesting

PaulDB: The term diversity includes socioeconomic, cultural, educational and cognitive diversity and sexual or gender orientation.

KaylaP: We had an online course just like that at the University of Houston.

PaulDB: I make reference to the course as a way of introducing the concept of "inclusion" to tonight's discussion.

MayraF: We had a class here at the university of Houston called Multiculturalism in urban settings

MayraF: my class wasn't online....it was face to face.....but I think I got a lot from it

VivianEM: Yes Mayra I remember that class

BJB2: Paul, I like your definition....it goes way beyond cultural diversity

PaulDB: My interest and what I hope to discuss is the relationship between the various students in each of your classrooms and the concept of assessment.

AmandaGT: many people do tend to only think cultural diversity when they hear the term "diversity"

VivianEM: ok

PaulDB: You are correct Amanda, but it is so much more.

PaulDB: Anytime we use the term assessment, we need to think about the individual student.

PaulDB: Assessment refers to (in my thinking) to the individual student and it is not the same as "testing".

KaytanaB: I understand what you are asking Paul, but what if you are witnessing a negative environment for the inclusion of diversity

NicoleLE: I often feel like inclusion hurts those students who need extra help more than it does help them

PaulDB: Negative environment? please explain.

KaytanaB: and it's not necessarily in class but the school shares the same sentiment

KaytanaB: there is no real acceptance of anything diverse, culturally, racially, SES, and especially sexual and gender orientation

PaulDB: If I may, the needs of a student should be considered in the context of the course, discipline, subject, or grade-level.

VivianEM: Yes, I agree. I have a few students who need that special one on one help and it is so difficult to give it to them without ignoring the rest of the class.

MollySC: I agree

KaylaP: I agree

PaulDB: Vivian, you have addressed my concerns head-on!

VivianEM: Perhaps there needs to be an inclusion specialist in the class at all times to reinforce.

MayraF: I understand that every student is an individual and therefore, each student needs a certain test because they might feel more comfortable working that way, which is the reason for creating different tests, but my question is, If there are many different types of children with different types of thinking and learning, how are we--the teachers--going to be able to create so many different tests and still keep sanity?

PaulDB: Think in terms of instructional content and then think in terms of instructional delivery.

PaulDB: They are not the same but there is a tendency to commingle the two issues.

MayraF: So the way that you give a test depends on the content you taught?

PaulDB: For example, there is a difference in "learning styles", just as there are differences in teaching styles.

VivianEM: Exactly

MayraF: right

KaylaP: That is correct

NicoleLE: There are several students in my class who have been continually "placed" in

the next grade level. They are reading at a 2nd grade level and should be on a fourth grade level

AmandaGT: I agree too

PaulDB: No, the test is to focus on the instructional content already delivered while assessment is used to help identify how the instruction will be delivered.

VivianEM: I'm in fourth grade and Yes, I have students who are on level and students who are at a first grade level. It is very difficult to instruct when this is the situation

KaytanaB: I remember in our differentiated instruction for diverse learners that our lessons should appeal to as many of the different learning styles as possible

CathyRa: I am a SDC teacher in Chula Vista CA

AmandaGT: that can be so difficult to do.. at least I find myself feeling that way some times

PaulDB: You are correct Kaytana, but remember you can provide the same instructional content but use different instructional strategies to accommodate the different students in your class.

KaytanaB: I use games sometimes as an assessment mechanism for the end of class sometimes, just to see if my class is understanding the content

KaylaP: That is why you create multi-sensory lessons that vary in learning styles

MollySC: that sounds like a good idea

MayraF: ok....so assessment is done before you actually give the lesson. It's when you study your students' learning styles to choose which will be the best way to proceed with the lesson?

VivianEM: I remember! Every child has his/her own learning styles, therefore authentic assessment is great.

CathyRa: I agree with the fact that differentiated instruction is difficult in a Special Ed class

CathyRa: I love authentic assessment

CathyRa: But ..standardized tests are the way we and our students are judged

PaulDB: Yes Myra, but you not only use assessment to help define instructional strategies but also to determine current level of knowledge of the instructional material

you are about to present.

CathyRa: Paul tell me more about defining instructional strategies

MayraF: ok...and going back to Cathy's comment....students are usually tested with standardized tests. I know that's not right--doesn't seem right--but it still happens

MayraF: at least here in Texas, it's all about standardized tests

CathyRa: I understand informing instruction....but the strategies part is hazy

MollySC: Indiana is the same way

PaulDB: Okay. But what do standardized test tell you about your students?

AmandaGT: My poor 3rd graders are focusing on math all day

KaylaP: that they can pass a test

CathyRa: It tells us how our students perform when compared to the norm

PaulDB: They simply provide information about how well your students perform in comparison to other similar groups of students.

NicoleLE: I think if they have inclusion, they shouldn't be permitted to use standardized tests, it just doesn't seem to make much sense

VivianEM: Standardized tests do not really test the students ability. Students are so diverse that you cannot base their test scores on comprehension

VivianEM: I agree

CathyRa: We all know our students are quite a few standard deviations below the norm

PaulDB: Unfortunately, Nicole, the use of standardized test has been expanded to include special education youth.

KaylaP: I agree but they are having more and more inclusion students taking the test

CathyRa: They all have to take the test

PaulDB: What we need to think about is how we take advantage of the information provided by those tests.

AmandaGT: but they have accommodations right?

KaylaP: there are only a handful that are exempt

MayraF: yes, I understand that standardized tests compare a student to the norm, but it still doesn't feel right for special ed or inclusion or ELL students to be taking the regular standardized test

CathyRa: What I think is ridiculous is that all children are expected to perform at the "proficient" range. Have you ever looked at a bell curve?

PaulDB: For example, a standardized test can be used as a form of assessment if you have access to the test-makers description of the test construct.

CathyRa: It is a mathematic impossibility

VivianEM: yes they do but the tests are still not really giving you the child's true intelligence, I know from experience.

AmandaGT: Oh I know that.. I see how my 3rd grade students are struggling

CathyRa: And when all students perform too well on the test ...it gets changed

PaulDB: Folks, remember that your job is to help kids learn how to learn.

CathyRa: Yes that is the ticket Paul

VivianEM: Exactly, and who is to say that those questions are relevant?

MayraF: That's true...

CathyRa: Facts and procedures are not what it is all about

AmandaGT: In 3rd grade.. I feel I am helping them learn how to take a test :(Even though I have thought of so many different ways to focus on the objectives.)

PaulDB: Content mastery (proficiency) is what the school board and the various State Departments of Education seek, but at the classroom level, it is helping kids learn how to learn.

CathyRa: Most of my students are simply learning how to read...don't you think that comes first?

KaytanaB: Again assessments help to monitor what content needs to be retaught or has already been mastered

NicoleLE: here's a thought, since there are so many different learning styles, couldn't we have a written test for some students and an oral test for others. Two students in my class

would score much higher if they could just tell you what they know. The reading part is what is hurting them. How can you understand the test if you can't read it?

CathyRa: Nicole....Yes

VivianEM: Yes

KaylaP: yes

MayraF: Ok for example, I know that many times a student may not pass a mathematics test because of his/her language barrier. We have even come to think that the math test is in reality an English test, because if the student doesn't understand what they are reading, well then, that's too bad for them

KaytanaB: this is what we can help with in class for our inclusion students

CathyRa: Once they can understand what they read they are on their way

AmandaGT: I agree Nicole

PaulDB: Nicole, what you have described is an "accommodation" and one that can be written into an IEP if the child is eligible for Special Education services.

MayraF: but it doesn't necessarily mean that they don't know how to work out those problems

VivianEM: Right on Mayra!

MayraF: So my question is, how can we utilize these tests for the betterment of the students???

NicoleLE: One of my students is quite good at math, but the test is so long that he shuts down halfway through. He has even said "This is a math test, not a reading test."

PaulDB: Instructional content is usually defined as an "objective".

CathyRa: I have thought about that a lot and I cannot think of any benefit to standardized tests

PaulDB: How you deliver that content is through a strategy.

VivianEM: I see what you mean Paul

CathyRa: Yes I know Paul but what on a assessment tells us what strategy to use?

PaulDB: If you have the results of a standardized test, you know what the student does

and what a student does not know.

MayraF: But the tests DO exist and they are not disappearing--at least not for now--so my thinking is how can we retrieve the GOOD out of them?

CathyRa: I think that there are many ways to tell what a student does and does not know...standardized test are probably the least informative

AmandaGT: But what if the student is just a bad test taker?

NicoleLE: that's a good point Mayra, we can't change it so we must learn how best to deal with it

PaulDB: But to truly understand the standardized test information, you also need to know what content was measured as compared to what content was taught.

KaytanaB: exactly

NicoleLE: true, so they are testing the teacher's ability too

MayraF: I see what you're saying, Paul

KaytanaB: I think many of us are getting frustrated over something that is state mandated and what we do not have control over

MollySC: I agree

KaytanaB: So then our focus becomes centered on our students

KaytanaB: WE have the power to assess them in our classrooms

CathyRa: I know ... it is just so hard to see our kids so anxious

PaulDB: If a student did poorly on a standardized test because the content being measured was NOT the content that was taught, then we need to re-think what it is we teach.

VivianEM: And how we teach it

AmandaGT: For example right now I am teaching 3rd grade math objective 4- I have thought of different ways to approach the objective.. other than just going over word problems in a packet...

MayraF: Actually I think it's the teachers who gets the students anxious and nervous and tired of dealing with the test

CathyRa: Paul I disagree

KaylaP: Then as teachers you should not put them in the state of mind, often they are reacting to what you and the school are pressuring them to do

CathyRa: There are so many factors that go into taking a standardized test

KaytanaB: which is important that we have our assessments of what we have taught them and what they are learning or not learning in our classrooms

CathyRa: The material is just a small piece

CathyRa: Our kids get confused by "wording"

NicoleLE: I think teachers stress out so much, often more than necessary, about their students passing because their jobs may be on the line

CathyRa: "format"

CathyRa: "bubbling"

CathyRa: pictures

CathyRa: no pictures

CathyRa: I could go on and on

PaulDB: No Cathy, standardized tests are developed to measure student knowledge on content that has been defined as appropriate to the age-**GRADE LEVEL OF THE STUDENTS TAKING THE TEST.**

KaylaP: then teach vocabulary if they are confused by wording

KaytanaB: yes but if they feel confident about the material they **DO** know it provides a sense of self efficacy and instills hope for the student

CathyRa: Some kids are just confused

AmandaGT: they measure what the TEKS state for the grade level.. correct?

CathyRa: They need structure and sameness to perform at their best

AmandaGT: (TEKS, here in Texas)

MayraF: Actually, you can't just teach vocabulary because for a student to fully understand vocabulary, it's more than just a simple definition to a word

VivianEM : During my observations I have noticed that students who are drilled for the tests do not carry anything with them in the future. They just do worse. Those students who are actually taught with hands on true meaning, carry it forever! It all depends on how you teach the curriculum

PaulDB: How the test is administered as well as the universality of its contents is what makes it standardized.

KaylaP: yes Amanda

CathyRa: Thanks Viv

NicoleLE: ok how about this. Is it possible that the people creating the test don't really know much about DAP for the kids whom the test is intended?

KaylaP: teaching the definition is not teaching vocabulary

KaylaP: I agree Vivian

CathyRa: Has anyone heard of the new alternate assessment> We can have our students take the CMA here in California

NicoleLE: For example, our school had a DCA-District common Assessment. It was written by a science and technology major and his wording was nearly at a 6th grade level.

CathyRa: It is supposed to be designed with kids who have IEPs in mind

MayraF: You might be right Nicole, but don't those test creators look at the TEKS or objectives that the student was supposed to have learned throughout the school year?

PaulDB: Test makers come from all sections of the education community and are supported by various consultants who create the statistical models used to provide the interpretation of the test results.

NicoleLE: yes that true

VivianEM : True

CathyRa: This is the first year we will implement it. I am curious to see if it makes a difference in their scores

CathyRa: Yeah...a true standardization...looks like a bell curve

NicoleLE: good luck Cathy. I really hope it proves helpful

CathyRa: If the curve gets too far to one side they change the test

AmandaGT: good idea

VivianEM: Very helpful

PaulDB: I would suggest that you determine what the test will cover (contents) and then look at your students to determine how to deliver the content. Not according to the test but according to good instructional practice.

CathyRa: Thanks Nicole...here's hoping

KaylaP: I completely agree Paul

KaytanaB: I agree Paul

VivianEM: I agree

PaulDB: Good instructional practice is where the use of strategies comes into focus.

CathyRa: I am all for seeing what works with your students...I think that is not achieved by assessment but by careful reflective teaching

NicoleLE: You can deliver information in the best possible way for each individual student. But the way they learn and practice each skill is not at all the way it is presented on an exam, so they have a hard time adjusting

CathyRa: You have a good point Nicole

PaulDB: Reflective teaching occurs after the lesson is taught and helps prepare the next lesson. It is a form of "self-assessment".

VivianEM: That's why you have to give some sort of assessment before hand to make sure you are all on the same page

MayraF: After I've done student teaching this semester and I've looked at the textbooks they use, I know that for every lesson, there are objectives that the student is working on. So it's at this time when the teacher needs to find unique ways to get the information through the best as possible?

KaytanaB: Is it okay to give an assessment before new content is learned, sort of like a pre-test

VivianEM: exactly

PaulDB: I am a firm believer in pre-testing!!!

CathyRa: OK ... I can agree with you there Paul

PaulDB: There is no sense teaching kids what they already know.

VivianEM: Always important. KWL somewhat

NicoleLE: yes, they are helpful for both the student and the teacher. I know they always helped me when I was in grade school

AmandaGT: you build on what they know

MayraF: That is totally true

CathyRa: It is not an assessment for the student but for the teacher...:)

KaytanaB: okay that's great I had experiences with students already knowing content

PaulDB: The pre-test can also be constructed to help identify appropriate strategies to be used to deliver instructional content.

VivianEM: Yes, that is important

CathyRa: We must be careful not to "teach to the test" but it is certainly important to have them familiar and informed on test taking strategies

JeffC: sure there is Paul (sense in teaching kids what they already know)... it's called "horizontal scaffolding"... you keep them on the same plane year after year so that they'll do fine on the state tests... happens all the time!

VivianEM: Also including higher level thinking questions.

MayraF: I had not thought of that this semester that I've done student teaching, but I'll sure use pre-testing when I start doing my own teaching

KaytanaB: which is true, scaffolding yes, beating a dead horse, no

PaulDB: For example, a portion of the pre-test could be developed using critical thinking skills, another portion could be simple recall, another portion could be matching, you get the idea.

JeffC: my second grader still does math that he knew as a first grader... my fourth grader is still learning times tables (a fourth grade standard now... I remember learning it in 2nd). so much for NCLB's emphasis on math!

AmandaGT: I agree Vivian.. there is nothing better than getting the students mind thinking outside of their comfort zone :)

MayraF: But at the moment, I see many MANY teachers teaching to the test

MollySC: how can that be avoided though?

PaulDB: Just because they do so does not mean that you should also Mayra.

CathyRa: Really? We can get in a lot of trouble for doing that

MayraF: I know that for sure

CathyRa: We have to cover the content

KaytanaB: they teach to the test due to insecurity of not providing the students with the right tools

PaulDB: Folks, remember what your job is. You can cover the content but do so in a way that facilitates the child learning how to learn.

MayraF: But when I try to come up with a different technique, or spend more time in a particular question, I feel the actual teachers' pressure there that I'm taking my time in explaining to the students

KaylaP: That is wonderful Cathy

CathyRa: My students are out of their comfort zone every day

MayraF: I guess it's harder right now because I'm only the student teacher and not the actual teacher in charge

PaulDB: Setting high expectations sounds good, but remember that those expectations should also be achievable by the students.

CathyRa: I really have empathy for my students

AmandaGT: and the good thing is that they loved being challenged with new questions and ideas.. at least the students in my teacher's 3rd grade.

CathyRa: Mayra ...what state are you teaching in?

KaytanaB: Here's a thought, remember teaching as being something that you enjoy

MayraF: Texas

PaulDB: You are so right Kaytana!!!

KaytanaB: When you don't enjoy it, your students probably won't enjoy it either

CathyRa: I love teaching...if I didn't I would not tolerate all the B.S.

KaylaP: And if you enjoy doing it, the students will enjoy learning it! It should never be a burden

MayraF: And I enjoy teaching, but whenever I don't feel pressured by another person

CathyRa: It's the kids and the teaching that make it worth it

NicoleLE nods to Kaytana

KaylaP: You will always have pressure from others, you are constantly evaluated

MayraF: That's why I can't wait to have my own classroom with my different ways to provide instruction

KaylaP: That is what makes you a better teacher

CathyRa: ohhhhhh, so true Kayla

PaulDB: Lets talk about how to deal with the "inclusion" students. Using peer tutors is useful for both non-English speaking kids as well as special education youth.

PaulDB: Using cooperative learning groups can be beneficial for all students both academically as well as socially.

KaytanaB: oh all we do in my co-taught and with my ELL and ESL students is cooperative work

PaulDB: I would think so.

CathyRa: Paul we have begun a form of instruction here in Chula Vista called the Gradual Release of Responsibility

MayraF: I know teachers are evaluated, but they're evaluated on the way they issue their instruction....not necessarily someone rushing you because there's tons of problems to work on

CathyRa: It has peer collaboration built into every lesson

AmandaGT: sounds interesting

PaulDB: But lets also think about special projects for individual or small groups of students and lets talk about different forms of student performance.

CathyRa: Chula Vista is right on the border of California and Mexico

CathyRa: We have many ELLS

NicoleLE: please tell us more Cathy

MollySC: what age is this done with?

CathyRa: 1/2 of my class is ELL and Sped

KaylaP: is there a program that is taught?

KaytanaB: I have one student who will not say anything in class but when he works in a group at least he says something

CathyRa: It is based on a researcher Doug Fischer's model

AmandaGT: the other students always tend to bring up the shy or quiet ones.. I love cooperative groups when done in a constructive and meaningful way.

PaulDB: A characteristic of Hispanic students is the tendency to work more effectively in a cooperative venue rather than as an independent worker.

CathyRa: You state the objective, model thinking, guided practice, peer collaboration, then independent

KaytanaB: it's amazing how well it works

MayraF: True because most are very social, but I guess you still got to be careful so as not to have only one or 2 students doing all the work

KaylaP: That is how I teach most of my lessons

CathyRa: On the SOLOM there is a silent stage...it is normal\

PaulDB: Good approach Cathy, is the "guided practice" also conducted at home as well as at school?

CathyRa: I wish...lol

MayraF: so assigning roles might be helpful

PaulDB: Yes Mayra!!

PaulDB: Role playing can be a very useful instructional strategy in certain classroom situations.

CathyRa: You can group the students in a variety of ways

CathyRa: to avoid some of that

KaylaP: I like that idea Mayra, it is also important to teach and model this approach at the beginning of the year

KaylaP: it is something that needs to be taught!

CathyRa: There will always be the workers and the ones you have to coax

MayraF: True....letting the students know what you expect out of them is great to have that cleared since the beginning of the year

NicoleLE: we do the same in my class, however, some of the higher level students start to get annoyed with those on a lower level because they are going "too slow" for them

PaulDB: Coaxing may not be the best way of looking at the students lack of involvement, perhaps just a re-arranging of the lesson's activity to capitalize on the students strength.

CathyRa: It would be interesting to me to hear what you expect from your students

NicoleLE: but it does seem to work much better than just a whole group or individual format

KaylaP: maybe you should try reassigning the groups as a possibility

BJB2 looks at the clock on the wall

MayraF: or maybe having different learning centers

NicoleLE: I think students learn/remember content more when they actually get to talk it out

BJB2: The next SPED discussion will be on May 19.

PaulDB: Group formation requires careful consideration of the individual students learning styles as well as educational/academic and social strengths.

CathyRa: I'll give you that ...Paul...but not all students

CathyRa: Are we out of time??

MayraF: Time flew by really quick

NicoleLE: wow, that flew by!

AmandaGT: Thank you for your time.. interesting discussions :)

KaylaP: That was a short session

PaulDB: No, it was a lively session!!

BJB2 smiles

NicoleLE: definitely will need more time to talk about this topic

CathyRa: Yes..it was wonderful...I appreciate your input

CathyRa: Thanks

NicoleLE: thanks so much!

KaytanaB: I learned a lot thanks everybody

MayraF: sure....once we get going on this topic, many things spring up

PaulDB: I look forward to picking up next time where we leave off tonight!!

CathyRa: Bye

MayraF: ok Paul....thanks for everything

KaylaP: Thank you, I enjoyed it!

AmandaGT: thank you!

KaytanaB: When is your next discussion Paul

PaulDB: I have enjoyed it and hope you all will return next month, same time and same place!!

KaytanaB: oh ok

KaytanaB: Thank you Paul

BJB2 . o O (check your May TI calendars)

AmandaGT left the room (signed off).

PaulDB: Thanks to each and every one of you this evening, I have learned a lot!

BJB2 sign of a good educator is that they're always learning :-)

BJB2: Thanks, Paul

PaulDB: BJ, after the past couple of months, tonight was a real joy!!

BJB2 agrees

PaulDB: There is so much we covered and so many topics identified for future discussions that I think we will have some very interesting sessions in the future.

BJB2: I hope so!

PaulDB: I am in the process of reviewing new texts for use in the community college course I am teaching. Trying to stay with an Ed Psych text as cannot find other materials that include the range of "diversity" topics I want included.

PaulDB: Found a good one by Slavin, who is something of an expert in Special Education.

BJB2: cool.

PaulDB: I am hoping that new teachers begin to understand that special education youth are just a different kind of student.

PaulDB: Want to talk next time about non-English speaking student as a part of our discussion if possible.

BJB2: I'll add that to the discussion topic

PaulDB: There seems to be relationship between the way teachers look at non-English speaking students and special education students.

BJB2: has it not always been like that?

PaulDB: Good!! Thanks!! Guess I'll close now and await the arrival of my copy of the transcript so I can review and make some notes to be used next month.

BJB2 hugs. Thanks again, Paul. Please give my regards to the family

PaulDB: Yes, but I don't think many teachers have realized it yet. I say that because of

the reactions in class by some of the students with whom I have been working.

PaulDB: By BJ!! See you next month!!