

Title of Session: Special Education Forum

Moderator: Paul Bohac

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PaulDB: There were a couple of posts this past week. Interesting question regarding core issues.

PaulDB: Can't remember the exact question, but thought the response was more reflective than direct and thus much more meaningful.

PaulDB: Also thought the post lifted from the ASCD Brief was very interesting. Somehow I missed the written report.

PaulDB: There is a new school in Vernon, FL (a small rural community north of here) that was created to serve autistic children.

BjB: Autism is getting a lot of press

JeffC: cool

PaulDB: Mother of such a child who is also a teacher has seen the need for the school and has the credentials and, apparently, the contacts.

JeffC: I just bought a book: Disrupting Class <http://snurl.com/disruptingclass>

JeffC: Amazon.com: Disrupting Class: How Disruptive Innovation Will Change the Way the World Learns: Clayton M. Christensen, Curtis W. Johnson, Michael B. Horn: Books [www_amazon_com]

PaulDB: Speaks to autistic kids and the issues they present in the classroom?

JeffC: not exactly

PaulDB: I think the thing that got my attention was the suggestion that the incidence of autism is so high.

JeffC: but you could extrapolate it... more about using tech and going in a myriad of directions.

PaulDB: The use of technology!!

JeffC: I do know that computers calm some very autistic (and violent) kids... that's been

my pragmatic experience.

PaulDB: Now that is something we could get into.

JeffC: gives them a focus they can interact with.

PaulDB: Also provides immediate feedback.

JeffC: here's another link to a number of excellent web 2 tools (nothing to do with sped offhand... but very useful): <http://snurl.com/web2tools>

JeffC: yup... feedback and interactivity... kinda important for everyone I think.

PaulDB: It seems to me that the teacher preparation programs do not focus enough attention on the use of technology in the classroom.

JeffC: because tech isn't on the test

PaulDB: Maybe, but I also think that those who conduct teacher training programs may feel a little uncomfortable with the technology.

PaulDB: Remember, the use of computers is a relatively recent event within the field of education.

PaulDB: Heck, I recall when a 20 gig hard drive was considered enormous!

JeffC: <http://www.notonthetest.com/>

PaulDB: No, what I was referring to was the array of opportunities to introduce technology into the classroom.

PaulDB: But, unlike paper, pencils, and text books, there are costs associated with technology that we haven't quite grown accustomed to paying.

PaulDB: Someone once compared software application programs to magazine subscriptions, a re-occurring cost.

PaulDB: You can tell I am getting excited my typing/spelling has gone to pot!

BJB: article on school for autistic children: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/06/15/AR2008061502010.html>

PaulDB: Thanks BJ.

PaulDB: This course I am teaching for the local community college has really exposed me to some fundamental weaknesses in our teacher preparation programs, especially

regarding technology.

BjB nods...I was trying to find an article I just read on that topic

BjB : I might have posted to the teaching teachers group

PaulDB : This week I am reviewing and evaluating juvenile justice Perkins grant applications. It is amazing what some of the grant applicants want to do.

BjB : like what?

PaulDB : What bothers me is that many of the "evaluations" seem to be focused more on program implementation rather than student outcomes.

PaulDB : For example, one program wants to expand its current training program to include specific preparation for employment following release of the clients who participate.

BjB : this preparation includes technology?

PaulDB : However, rather than focus on Occupational Completion Points, or numbers who achieve a vocational certificate, they want to look at the use of the technology (including various software application programs as well as different forms of technology).

BjB : can the two be mutually inclusive?

PaulDB : I guess I see technology as a tool to help kids learn how to learn and as a tool that enables a person the opportunity to earn his/her daily bread.

PaulDB : I think they can BJ. For example, someone who completes an A+ certification course improves their chance for an IT position.

BjB nods...so the learning tool becomes a tool for employment

PaulDB : At the same time, the time-management skills, the attention to details, and the ability to draw a system diagram provides other, perhaps more transferable benefits.

PaulDB : Jeff talked last month, (I think) about something he was doing with his son.

BjB : I think we also have to consider the audience...who is receiving this education

BjB : Jeff does a wonderful job with his children...and gives them lots of one on one attention

PaulDB : He was talking about a speech to text program.

PaulDB: I can think of a number of ways such a program could be used for all age- grade levels.

BjB nods. For non-readers or LD kids speech to text is great

PaulDB: But I believe that the teacher preparation programs tend to segregate certain programs by age-grade levels.

PaulDB: It is that tendency that I oppose if for no other reason than because of the diversity of students found in a regular education classroom.

BjB: a response for a post I made on assistive tech on the discussion board reflects that, Paul: Even though assistive technology is required to be considered now legally, I continue to be surprised at how many teachers are not aware of the range of supports. It also amazes me that schools of education do not seem to infuse the instruction for future and current teachers with this important information either.

PaulDB: That post was what really got me thinking about the issue.

BjB: I see that a lot when there are preservice teachers logged in, Paul

BjB . o O (and Jeff probably does too)

PaulDB: It may also have something to do with "control" in the classroom.

BjB: too much to teach and too little time in the teacher ed programs

PaulDB: How many times have you been confronted with a youngster who actually knew more than you about the technology you were attempting to use?

BjB: oh, lots of times...that gave me a resource person to ask when I had problems!

PaulDB: I have to get one of my daughters to program my phone and if the remote goes out, I have to get up, go to the TV and change the channels and the volume.

BjB: at least you know how to get up and do those things

PaulDB: See, you and I know that it is an advantage to enlist the help of a student in such situations.

BjB nods

PaulDB: New teachers may be reluctant to accept such help from a student out of fear that doing so may "undermine" their authority.

BjB : unfortunate.

PaulDB: I also think that teacher prep programs are reluctant to change the way in which they conduct classes. Can you imagine what it would be like for a teacher prep program to rely almost exclusively on technology?

BjB : no classes depend totally on tech unless you're an online school/course

PaulDB: True, BJ, but I was thinking more along the lines where the class projects require the use of different technology as part of both the teacher and the student presentations.

BjB : like smartboards?

JeffC: yup... and most don't know various systems, or are locked into one, and/or don't have support for hybrid solutions.

PaulDB: Rather than merely writing a paper, do a Power Point presentation, rather than deliver a lecture with overheads or power point, use a smartboard, rather than conduct a biology class using dead animals, use a 3-d projector.

BjB : this is a wonderful article on research <http://www.odt.co.nz/lifestyle/magazine/9500/going-where-no-fact-has-gone>

BjB nods to Paul. Using those tools seamlessly integrates tech into the curriculum

PaulDB: Yeah, I have been getting a copy of Edutopia and there are numerous articles on the use of technology in the classroom for a variety of different applications.

JeffC: yeah... and although Edutopia (and Converge, T.H.E.) and other excellent journals are *free* for educators... how many actually subscribe (let alone use the info)?

PaulDB: See, I feel a little uncomfortable myself in this area because I don't have access, except vicariously, to so much of what is now available.

JeffC: get some computers for your class, Paul.

JeffC: contact a local corporation and see if they'll turn over some to your school after they refresh.

PaulDB: Well, I make it a point to advise the students in the teacher-preparation class I teach to get a subscription and even provide them with the information.

PaulDB: I would really like to see a smartboard in operation and have the experience of using one.

PaulDB: I would like to play with a speech to text program so I could demonstrate the program in class to new teachers who are faced with an ESOL population.

JeffC: there are a number of smartboards lying fallow in my district.

PaulDB: Send me one!!

PaulDB: The local school district is facing a multi-million dollar budget shortfall and expenditures are being cut back.

JeffC: tell them to start with textbooks, not tech.

PaulDB: Jeff, I am so exasperated with the current school board and superintendent that I might try and mount a challenge if for no other reason than to force some discussion on several issues including the need for technology.

PaulDB: A good teacher, with a blackboard, some paper and pencils can help kids learn how to learn. But a teacher, with adequate technology and tech support can do so much more to prepare a child to live in today's world while preparing for the future.

PaulDB: We seem stuck in the past with the emphasis on high stakes testing.

PaulDB: But, I am about to get on my soapbox and that will not do.

BjB: then perhaps we should look at the clock on the wall?

PaulDB: The current proposal to save money is to close one school, re-purpose another, and terminate the contract for a charter school.

PaulDB: Okay, I know what that means.

BjB: Thanks for being here tonight, Paul. Keep on fighting the good fight!

PaulDB: Well I enjoyed it. It is always good to spend time with friends.

BjB: it can get frustrating preaching to the choir, but sometimes it does good to vent ;-)

PaulDB: Hope you both have a good month and I guess we will be back here on July 21, 2008.

BjB hugs goodnight. Take care.

BjB: Thanks, Jeff...good luck with the hose dilemma

PaulDB: Yes!! Venting is good for both reef fish brought up from great depths and for angry teachers who want the best for their students!!!

BjB smiles and nods