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TechQuest:
Applying Technology to Become Organized

The Problem of Practice

Organization is one of the hardest things to keep as a teacher today. Many teachers try to get organized in their classrooms, and there are a lot of books on how to make them organized. However, my classroom is a bit different than the "typical" classroom. I teach a self-contained/push-in EI classroom (all depending on what the student needs, how they are able to function by themselves, and how their day is going on any given day) called the "Journey room." The major need I have in my classroom is organization. I feel as though I have ten different jobs to do and I am simply trying to put out small fires so that I can make it through my day. I want to have something set in place that I can have lesson plans for my EI program, schedules for my day as well as my two aides and three full-time pull out students, ideas for push in classes, and assistive technology ready to use in the classroom.

This project will be successful when the students are achieving their IEP goals. In order to make this happen, we (the teachers/aides) will see the students able to be calmer in classes and become more efficient while working in and out of the Journey room. My aides will be able to know where to be at any given time and know what they could be doing if the students didn't need extra help. The aides will be able to look at any of the schedules (on the chalkboard, SMARTBoard, or clipboards). My students will be able to be in their general education classrooms more often because we have become so proficient at working on their assignments in the Journey room.

The Setting

This project will help my entire classroom including the teachers (with aides) to know what to be teaching at a certain time of day. It will help the students, so that they aren't wasting time in the Journey classroom while we are trying to find lesson plans to teach the students. It will help the subject matter and curriculum to have topics and main ideas grouped together so that students can learn more efficiently and effectively with common topics. The project will definitely help the atmosphere and setting in the Journey room inside the classroom and bringing our teachings into the students home classrooms. If the students are working proficiently on assignments and learning while in the Journey room, they will stay calmer in and out of the Journey room. This will help them to be able to deal with their emotions and work toward their IEP goals.

Technology-Integrated Solution

I hope to be able to organize my classroom by implementing individualized schedules for students, lesson plans organized by subject, and a curriculum put into place with a timeline. I hope to have assistive technology for my students to use on a daily basis. I have a lot of technology to use in my classroom, but I need to find assistive technology to use with it so that the students can learn easier and show that they have learned what they need to know in a simple manner.

The problem of being unorganized and having no help for the students to get their work done on their own with efficiency and self-satisfaction is something that is a big problem in many classrooms, especially special education classrooms. In my classroom, my students can have any kind of schedule from being in a general education classroom all day, to partially in general education and partially in special education, to being in special education all day. They could have this change all within

one week. In order to be more effective to my students, I want to be prepared for different situations that could occur. Without a plan in place, chaos happens. This is why I would like to make a main schedule for my classroom.

Off of this main schedule, I would like to make lesson plans and a curriculum that fits into the organization pattern of what a student with an emotional impairment needs to learn. Students with emotional impairments have so many academics to learn, along with basic behavior aspects of socializing with their classmates and teachers. Without a curriculum and subject-specific lesson plans to be organized from, teachers will not know what the student has already learned in their social skills, and what proficiency they have with their IEP goals. If there were a curriculum lined up for students with emotional impairments, teachers would be able to take their lessons and goals from this main curriculum and know exactly what the student needed to work on next. This will make for more consistent and organized IEPs and goals for students.

In order for me to become a better technology pioneer, I plan to get my graduate degree in educational technology to advance my knowledge as much as I know how at this time. I want to learn how to get the best ideas for the most proficient technology education. I plan to keep looking up lessons, ideas, plans, and worksheets/charts online in order to find the latest and most innovative ideas available. I think one of the best things I can do in order to become a technology pioneer is to keep being excited and knowledgeable. If people see how much fun I am having with technology, they will want to do the same.

In order to become more proficient technology learners in my classroom, I plan to have students exposed to technology as much as possible. Whenever the opportunity

comes, I have my students working on the SMARTBoard, using the sound system, or working on a computer. One way to get students to "cool off" is to have them work on the computer or do a Feelings Powerpoint I created. Technology is something that is fun and new to students so it often gets their minds off what they are angry about. If the student starts to think about the computer instead of the thing they are angry about, then they can calm down much quicker and easier.

The students, aides, and I will all use the schedules daily to be able to check when we need to be where. My aides and I will use the lesson plans and curriculum to know what to teach the students next and for when we need interventions when their behaviors become disruptive. Having these organization tools will definitely help our classroom to become more efficient and self-serving. The students will be able to help themselves and the aides will know what to do when, and where to go, and where to find ideas for lessons to help the students. This way we can be three times as fast in our classroom.

Implementation Journal

As far as the lesson plans for the EI program, I have started by looking in the books I have in my classroom, along with my online resources. I have made a main copy of every lesson I feel would be good to use in my program. I have them grouped them by subject. I have also come up with a curriculum timeline of how long I would like to work on what subject and what order I should work with each of the subjects. This curriculum will allow me to then come up with dates for when I will work with each subject.

I then took the lessons and scanned them into the computer so that they are ready to use on the SMARTBoard at any time in the curriculum throughout the year. They then again were organized on the computer by subject area. I have copied about half of the lessons I would like to and put them into groups. I have been using the lessons in order

so far, but haven't yet used my own curriculum to use with students that is organized by subject area. Until I make the final curriculum timeline, I do not want to get my lessons out of order. We are starting a new term in January, and I hope to start with my curriculum timeline then.

When I am done organizing, timing, and adjusting, I would like to pick out what lessons would be good to use in the push in setting and also find other lessons to use in the classrooms. This needs to be done so that my students in the special education program along with the students in the general education setting can learn how to deal with their emotions. I hope to have this completed by the end of January.

I made a master schedule for what my students are doing at what time. I put it up in the classroom where anyone can see what needs to be done at anytime throughout the day. I also made individualized schedules for students that my aides or myself carry with the students so they know what needs to be completed during what timeframe. My schedule on the board to imitate my lesson plans is working great. I was thinking of putting one on my SMARTBoard also. Then I will be able to easily tweak it and have students change and cross out things as needed. I hope to have this done during Christmas Break.

I have found assistive technologies to use in my classroom. I was able to find technology programs to help teach earlier reading skills to higher grade levels. I also found a great website to find activities to use on the SMARTBoard (http://exchange.smarttech.com/). I plan to keep a list of programs and assistive technologies on my webpage. I am currently looking, and will always look, to keep my lessons, curriculum, and assistive technologies up to date.

Findings

I feel that this project is going very well. I am getting myself organized using the Internet and my computer. I am able to keep myself organized with my lesson plans using Open Office. I have made about four different lesson plan templates since I have started, since I have such a hectic classroom. I have created each in Open Office and changed and tweaked them. My newest lesson plan seems to be working the best. Overall, my TechQuest project has been going as well as I could have hoped. I haven't been able to get some areas completed as quickly as I would have liked to, but other areas have been going faster than I thought they would.

My students have been doing much better for the past three weeks. All three of the students who have recently had to come into the Journey room full-time, are able to spend most of their days in their general education classrooms. We have not had to restrain a student in four weeks (for the two weeks before these weeks, we were restraining at least once per day). My two aides and I have been in six different classrooms throughout the days for the past two weeks. We have been doing very well knowing where to go when, and are able to easily find out where to go next. We have been able to find lesson plans easily and the students are much happier. It feels as though the whole room has become calmer because we have become more organized (we even organized the physical part of the room!). I feel that this project is improving our classroom, but still has work to do. We now need to take our organization out into the rest of the school. We need to share our schedules, lesson plans, and communicate more with other teachers.

Implications:

If I were to do this again in the future, I think I would have a better idea of how

long each task would take, and what order I needed to get each thing completed. One of the reasons I wanted to do this TechQuest project was so that I could organize and start a curriculum for special education teachers. There are so few special education teachers for students with emotional impairments compared to general education teachers. I hoped that by completing this project, more teachers will be able to have a resource to use in their classroom for a curriculum and organization tool.

In years to come, I plan (as all teachers do) to change, tweak, and update my lessons and curriculum. This will be much easier now that I have a baseline curriculum to get me started in my classroom. I plan to add more lessons and activities to this curriculum, and continue to update my organization tools. When I update my lessons in the future, I am now familiar with getting them into the computer and finding them online. I am also familiar with updating my schedules and organization tools that I have on my computer. It is always easier when you have a starting point to push off from.