Empathy and Special Education

WebQuest Description: This Webquest is to familiarize students with empathy, the different devices that are used to assist SPED students, to become familiar with the differences and become comfortable around those who have special needs.

Grade Level: 6-8

Curriculum: Life Skills / Careers

Keywords: empathy, assistive technology, integration, peer relations

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Introduction

Do you wonder what the student in "that" room is doing, does he scare you a little or make you wonder if you will "catch" what he has? How do other students make you feel? What are they feeling? In the next 2 weeks, you will get to know the students in the special education room, learn about their challenges and learn about the technology that they use to help them learn.

Tasks

During the two week project, we will learn what empathy is, get to know the special education students, learn about their struggles with completing (what we consider) simple tasks and learn about the assistive devices they use to help them learn. While completing these tasks, students will journal, complete activities that will help them relate to the special education students, watch a video and write an essay on the project.

Process

Day 1: You will learn, through special activities, about some of the feelings, sensations, and learning difficulties that special education kids feel on a normal basis. Watch YouTube video. Discuss empathy. You will complete activity #1 on Autism. You will be split up into six groups of four. You will journal your thoughts and feelings on what you have learned today. (at least 5 complete sentences)

Day 2: In your groups you will spend a half an hour observing in the special education room, meeting the students and seeing some of what they do during their school day. As a class you will complete activity #2. In your journal make a list of any items you saw being used in the special education classroom to help the students learn. Describe how 5 of the devices were being used and how you think they helped the students. (at least 5 complete sentences)

Day 3: Each student will choose a student that they met the previous day to spend time with each day and get to know better. Eat lunch with your special education partner. Talk about your favorite foods. Explore website at http://library.thinkquest.org/11799/ In your journal make a list of any items you saw being used in the special education classroom to help the students learn. Describe how 5 of the devices were being used and how you think they helped the students. (at least 5 complete sentences)

Day 4: Eat lunch with your special education partner and talk about favorite activities. Groups 1-3 will use a motorized wheelchair to maneuver through an obstacle course. Groups 4-6 will start researching online about assistive technology and how it is used. This will be information for your essays. Take notes or copy to a Word document and save the information. (at least 5 complete sentences)

Day 5: You will spend a half an hour in the special education classroom. Groups 4-6 will use a motorized wheelchair to maneuver through an obstacle course. Groups 1-3 will start researching online about assistive technology and how it is used. This will be information for your essays. Take notes or copy to a Word document and save the information. (at least 5 complete sentences)

Day 6: Eat lunch with your special education partner and talk about the technology they use in their classroom. Complete activity #3, Celebrities with Disabilities. Research online and fill in the activity sheet with the disability that each celebrity has. (at least 5 complete sentences)

Day 7: You will spend a half an hour in the special education classroom. Use the information you have written in your journal and the information you researched online to start your rough draft for your essay. (at least 5 complete sentences)

Day 8: You will spend a half an hour in the special education classroom. Finish your rough draft for your essay and turn it in. Make corrections and revise the corrected version of your essay. (at least 5 complete sentences)

Day 9: Eat lunch with your special education partner and talk about some of the places you have visited. (at least 5 complete sentences)

Day 10: Turn in the completed final draft of your essay.
Students will be evaluated throughout the course of this webquest lesson. Each day students will be interacting with an individual with special needs to learn empathy and gain a better understanding of their difficulties and differences. Students will be graded on their involvement with their partner as well as their participation of group activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category and Score</th>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation - 30%</td>
<td>Did not spend time with special education partner. Was not involved in learning activities.</td>
<td>Spent 3-5 days with special education partner. Involvement in learning activities was minimal.</td>
<td>Spent 5-7 days with special education partner. Actively participated in learning activities.</td>
<td>Spent allocated time or more, during 7-9 of the days, with special education partner. Fully participated during learning activities and added ideas to the activities.</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal - 25%</td>
<td>There are less than 3 sentences and did not contain required information.</td>
<td>There are 3 or more sentences that are not complete and do not contain much detail or opinions.</td>
<td>There are 5 complete sentences that discuss the days events, but with little detail and opinions.</td>
<td>There are 5 or more complete sentences each day on the required topic. Sentences show a good grasp of the days activities and describe observations on what they experienced and saw.</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay: Content - 50%</td>
<td>The essay contains little information about the special education project, does not reflect on activities and does not give personal observations.</td>
<td>The essay reflects on activities, interaction, and assistive devices, but does not relate to their feelings and viewpoints. Student has a minimum of 400 words.</td>
<td>The essay reflects on most of the activities, personal feelings, and assistive devices used in the classroom. Student has a minimum of 500 words.</td>
<td>The essay reflects all areas of the special education project. Student discusses reflections of student partnership, the different assistive devices they saw being used and how they related to the class. Student also gives personal feelings and thoughts on how they thought about special education students before the project and now. Student has a minimum of 500 words.</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay: Punctuation and Grammar - 5%</td>
<td>Surface errors are pervasive enough that they impede communication of meaning. Inappropriate word choice and/or sentence construction are evident.</td>
<td>Some mechanical errors or typos are present, but are not overly distracting to the reader. Correct sentence structure and audience-appropriate language.</td>
<td>Prose is largely free of mechanical errors, although a few may be present. Uses a variety of sentence structures and effective figures of speech.</td>
<td>Writer is clearly in command of standard, written, academic English.</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Score 500

Conclusion

Congratulations! You have now completed the webquest. I hope you have learned about SPED students and how assistive technology can benefit different learning needs. Now take some time to reflect, maybe in a discussion with your groups, what you have learned. Do you have a better understanding of Special Education Students? Are you comfortable with accepting the differences of those with special needs? Did you experience empathy and understanding for someone else’s feelings through the activities? Which activities did you experience the most difficulties with? Which technology tools did you think were the most helpful? How will what you have learned from this webquest impact your feelings toward others?

Teacher Page

With this webcast we hope to provide teachers a place to go to teach their students about empathy. Empathy, in particular, for special education students. Students that must endure great struggle and the use of special equipment just to get up in the morning and go to school. This special equipment, known as assistive technology is being used more often and has become more visible in the schools. Assistive Technology allows students who would normally not be able to attend school to do so almost like a regular student. Assistive technology helps students to see, to hear, to move around from place to place, to eat, to use the keyboard and many other things that they normally would not be able to do. Many regular students do not know how to feel...
about these special students or how to interact with them. We want to teach and demonstrate empathy in order to make it easier for all students to grow and learn more comfortably with each other.

**Standards**

**EALR 1:** The student uses listening and observation skills and strategies to gain understanding.

**Component 1.1:** Uses listening and observation skills and strategies to focus attention and interpret information.

**NOTES:** Listening behavior will vary according to culture, learning style, and situation. Verbal and nonverbal cues must be taught explicitly. Do not assume they are universal.

1. **1.1.1** Applies a variety of listening strategies to accommodate the listening situation.
   - Uses listening strategies for: enjoyment listening, active listening (GLE 1.1.2), empathetic listening, and critical listening (GLE 1.2.1) appropriate to the situation (e.g., teacher instruction, one-on-one discussion with teacher or peer, small group communication with peers, class discussion, listening to an oral presentation, listening to/viewing mediated communication, group work).

2. **1.1.2** Applies a variety of listening and observation skills/strategies to interpret information.
   - Monitors and adjusts strategies to interpret information (e.g., attends and listens carefully; elaborates; paraphrases information; makes connections both within and beyond presentation; processes information and ideas by drawing pictures, using graphic organizers, and taking notes).
   - Asks probing questions to extend information (e.g., to clarify meaning, to gain insight, to consider other perspectives).

**EALR 2:** The student uses communication skills and strategies to interact/work effectively with others.

**Component 2.1:** Uses language to interact effectively and responsibly in a multicultural context.

2. **2.1.1** Analyzes the needs of the audience, situation, and setting to adjust language.
   - Selects language that is respectful of others’ feelings and rights (e.g., free from stereotyping, bias, slander, or harassment).
   - Adjusts language to enhance relationships and resolve conflict (e.g., “Amandari, what I hear you saying is…..” “Trung, I apologize; I misunderstood what you were saying.”).
   - Chooses language to influence others (e.g., to persuade, correct, or disagree).
   - Adjusts language register to the situation (e.g., classroom, school office, counselor, mock job interview).

**Component 2.2:** Uses interpersonal skills and strategies in a multicultural context to work collaboratively, solve problems, and perform tasks.

2. **2.2.1** Uses communication skills that demonstrate respect.
   - Expresses one’s self while considering others (e.g., avoids interrupting the speaker, uses and understands cues for taking turns, allows pause time before speaking, asks for feedback/input from others).
   - Responds to indirect and direct indication that others need clarification (e.g., reads possible confusion on someone’s face and clarifies by asking a question; responds to someone’s request for examples and or elaboration).
   - Provides feedback to the speaker in role-play scenarios or classroom activities based on appropriate form of listening (e.g., enjoyment, active, critical, and/or empathetic listening).
   - Refutes others in non hurtful ways by disagreeing with ideas respectfully according to established classroom norms (e.g., “Arturo, I see what you’re saying; however, …”).

2. **2.2.2** Applies skills and strategies to contribute responsibly in a group setting.
   - Contributes relevant ideas with support/evidence by clarifying, illustrating, or expanding (e.g., contributes topics related to ideas, with support, and talks in turn, with consideration for others in the conversation).
   - Encourages and supports equal participation within the group.

**Component 2.3:** Uses skills and strategies to communicate inter-culturally.

2. **2.3.1** Understands cultural/individual perspectives and assumptions and how they influence intercultural communication.
   - Identifies differing cultural and individual perspectives and/or assumptions and explains how they may affect intercultural communication (e.g., “How might one’s perspective on fishing rights be influenced by culture?”; “How might one’s perspective on immigration be influenced by culture?”).
   - Identifies and explains factors that may cause misunderstanding among cultures (e.g., mismatched expectations: linear versus circular conversation, speaking time, eye contact, body language, expectation of sequence for taking turns, physical space).
   - Examines own cultural biases with structured teacher guidance.

2. **2.3.2** Applies intercultural communication strategies.
   - Uses knowledge of factors that may cause misunderstanding among cultures to communicate inter-culturally (e.g., mismatched expectations: linear versus circular conversation styles, speaking time, eye contact, body language, expectation of sequence for taking turns, oral cultural styles).

**EALR 3:** The student uses communication skills and strategies to effectively present ideas and one’s self in a variety of situations.

**Credits**

Thanks to Dr. Leah Barley for giving us this interesting assignment in order to build our collaboration skills and to become effective teachers.

I would like to thank you Andrea Ganders for gracefully leading us in this assignment. Abby Suggs

I would like to thank you Aston Adams for sharing in this assignment. Abby Suggs

I would like to thank you Andre Martineau for sharing in this assignment. Abby Suggs

**Other**

“Empathetic children relate their own emotions in similar situations and respond to their peers with kindness and consideration.”
The classroom is more than just a place for students to learn reading and math skills. This is one of the main settings where children learn to communicate and interact with people. The citizenship lessons children learn in school help to shape the way they behave as adults. One of the most important lessons in interacting with people is learning to show empathy, or relating to the feelings and experiences of other people and responding with kindness. As children develop their social skills, they may need guidance from adults to learn how to show empathy to others in the classroom.” Jessica Mahoney, eHow Contributor