INCREASING CRITICAL THINKING

One Unit: A Variety of Assessments

Last semester Spring 2014:

**Formative Assessments: Summative Assessment:**

Student PowerPoints Research-based essay

Whole-class Discussion

Mix/Match/Freeze

This semester Fall 2014:

**Formative Assessments: Summative Assessment:**

Student PowerPoints Research-based essay

Completed Graphic Organizers

Whole-class Discussion

Individual Debate

Online Discussion Forum

Mix/Match/Freeze

**SMALL GROUP WORK**

Students had 3 topics: full inclusion, partial inclusion, self-contained classrooms

In small groups students shared research and information, but each student is responsible to create his/her own electronic, research-based presentation.

**SMALL GROUP PRESENTATIONS- JIGSAW**

New groups are created to include: 1 student from the previous full inclusion group, 1 students from the previous partial inclusion group, and 1 student from the previous self-contained group. Students present to one another and complete a graphic organizer in order to take comprehensive notes that can later assist them with their debate and essay.

**CANVAS DISCUSSION FORUM**

Each student must post 5 key points from their research on full inclusion, partial inclusion, or self-contained and must respond to the postings of at least 3 classmates in a substantial manner.

**DEBATE**

Often, students fall into the trap of looking at one side of an issue, and typically that is the ‘most popular side’. Students often believe in what they think the professor believes in because you are in a position of authority.

Instead, we need to teach and encourage students to come to their own conclusions after looking at all sides of an issue through research, experience, and more.

**Example:** My students are studying inclusion (special needs students with a variety of disabilities—physical, emotional, learning are placed in mainstream classrooms and learn in that environment instead of being pulled out for Special Education). Inclusion is a big push in today’s schools, and there is a great deal of research to support this. In addition, many of my students are interning in schools where inclusion is implemented. For this reason, they may assume that this is the best, the only, possible program that provides special needs students with a quality education and that this works for all students.

**My goal:** to have students research and analyze a variety of Special Education models. They participate in group discussions, in partner work, prepare their own presentations for the class on multiple perspectives, and write an extensive research paper to include all that they have learned.

**Final step: Debate**

I randomly assign students a particular viewpoint that they must debate whether they believe in it or not. The purpose is to show them that there are pros and cons for every program, and that often there is no one right answer. After the debate, students will then be in a much better position to formulate their own conclusion based on a great deal of research, individual and group work, and more.

****

**ESSAY**

Students take all they have learned about the 3 Special Education models over the past few weeks and write a comprehensive, research-based essay including multiple perspectives on the various models as well as taking a definitive stance on which they feel is best and why.

**How To’s of Organizing an In-Class Debate in 50 minutes**

**BEFORE: Create Your Debate Groups and Assign Topic:**

Group 1- partial inclusion/pull-out programs

Group 2- full inclusion

Group 3- resource rooms

**DURING: Steps for the Debate**

They stand in 3 lines by group.

Each group member has 1 minute (timed) to present his/her argument, and we alternate by group until each class member has presented.

As others are presenting, students take notes in preparation for their rebuttal.

Each group then has 3 minutes for rebuttals before we decide as a class which group made the best argument for their respective position.

**AFTER: Mix/match/freeze**

After the debate, students walk around the class, pair up with someone when I say match, and each person then has 30 seconds to discuss what they’ve learned from this unit, and where they stand on the issue. ***This is where I get to circulate and listen ensuring that each student has come to his/her own conclusion on the topic.***

