

What I did

I taught a session on autism to an undergraduate level class called introduction to exceptionalities. The course instructor was nice enough to let me come in and present on any topic I chose. When she told me the options and I saw that autism was a topic they would be covering I asked her if I could present on it. Autism is a topic that fascinates me so I was glad to have the opportunity to look at it more closely for the sake of presenting.

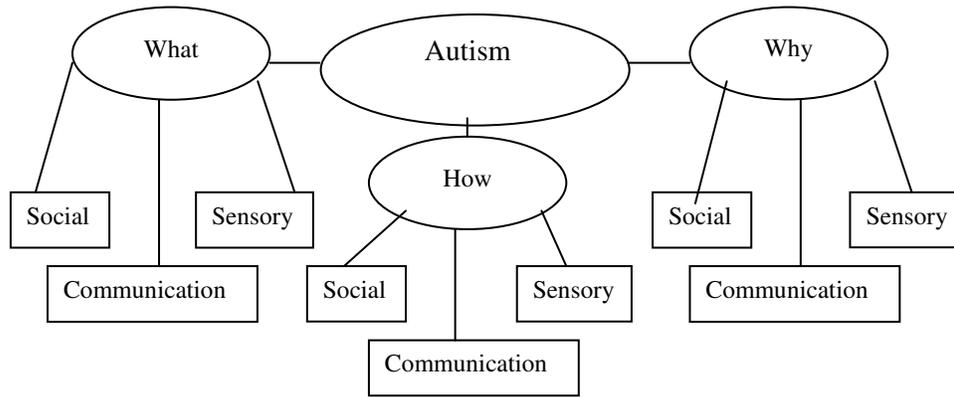
Preparation

- Developed a lesson plan based on differentiated instruction, universal design for learning, adult learning principles, and flexible grouping using the class' assigned textbook as a starting place for a content outline
- Accessed additional content through my own personal notes and handouts from previously attended presentations on autism, textbooks, publications of the National Research Council, and professional organizations such as the National Autism Society of America and Autism Speaks
- Developed a Power Point presentation including an interactive Turning Point quiz, questions for a tiered activity, and reflective journaling prompts
- Put together a packet of handouts for the students including the (a) PowerPoint handouts, (b) questions for the tiered activity on different colored sheets of paper, (c) informational readings on educational implications, family stress, and inclusion for children with autism to assist in the completion of the tiered activity, (d) the reflective journaling prompts on colored paper with lines for writing, and (e) session evaluation Sarah Jackson and I developed earlier this semester

Presentation + Activities

- I arrived early and had the technology experts in the building help me set up my computer, the projector, the turning points technology, and access to the internet.
- As the students walked into the classroom, I had them pick up a packet of handouts and a “clicker” for the quiz.
- Introduced myself to the students, explained why I was there, and shared the objectives and agenda with the class
- I then gave the instructions and began the quiz. The Turning Point quiz turned out to be a success. I say it was successful because of two things (1) it worked (2) the students were engaged in the lesson.
- Then we went over the Power Point slides with the definition of autism, the diagnostic criteria for autism, the prevalence, and characteristics. In the middle of my presentation of the slides, my laptop ran out of batteries. In the midst of making sure everything was up and running, I had forgotten to plug in the computer. The classroom instructor was nice enough to plug it in for me while I continued to lecture to the students.
- It was my intention to show the video next, but since the computer temporarily disconnected, the internet access wasn't connecting. In order not to waste the students' time, I instead had them move into the tiered activity. The students answered a different set of questions based on how many questions they got right on the quiz. They were allowed to work in groups, pairs, or individually. While they completed the activity we (myself, the instructor, and the technology expert from the building) got the internet back up running.

- I watched for most people to look finished and had them share their findings with me... I drew a graphic organizer on the board and went through each category asking for one example of each to add to the organizer



- We then watched the 13 minute version of the video “Autism Every Day”... accessed from autismspeaks.org. After the video I talked briefly about the controversial nature of the video.
- I saw there was only 10 minutes left before the end of class, so after the video I summarized the next few slides regarding early intervention in about one to two sentences each, interjected a promotion for the ECIS program, and then had them go right to reflective journaling and filling out the session evaluations.
- The results of the evaluations showed that there was a pretty evenly distributed opinion of which part of the presentation was most beneficial. Many students felt the video and the interactive quiz were the most powerful, while others stated that the tiered activity and the lecture were the most helpful to their learning. The evaluations also made it clear that the some of the students’ prior views on the topic of autism were changed due to the presentation. All of the students reported they thought the presentation was organized,

clear, beneficial, and that their learning goals were either completely or somewhat supported.

- The results of the reflective journaling activity showed me that most of the students met at least some if not all of the learning objectives for the session.

What the literature says

- Adult learners appreciate the content being relevant to their work (Lieb, 1991)
- Differentiating instruction can lead to increases in student growth and individual success (National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum, 2002)
- Organize and prepare materials, set clear learning goals, move beyond the textbook, integrate technology, use cooperative learning (Orkwis, 2003)
- Flexible grouping can make students more productive (Valentino, 2000)
- Tiered instruction allows students to work at appropriate challenge levels (Kingore, 2005)
- A pre-assessment should be conducted in order to prescribe content materials to learners for a tiered activity (Kingore, 2005)

What I would do differently next time

Preparation

- I spent many hours preparing for this presentation. Between the lesson plan development, the research, the activity development, the preparation of handouts, and the Turning Point technology, I probably spent 20 hours working on this presentation. While it was nice to be able to put together a presentation with so much intentionality, I'm not sure how

realistic it is to always spend so much time preparing for one lesson. I also have to consider that my learning curve was steep for many of the activities. Perhaps in the future, some of the elements will take less time as I become more competent. In the future I might prepare only one activity per class session and I could spend more time on each activity (i.e. develop them further to promote higher level thinking).

- We ran out of time at the end of the class for me to present everything I had planned. I think estimating how much can be covered in an allotted time is a learning curve issue, but nevertheless, I planned more than could be done in an hour and 15 minutes. In the future I could try adding 5 minutes to my estimated time for each activity. Adding 5 minutes might give me some wiggle room for transitions and/or student questions. If I was teaching my own class, I could adjust the schedule to fit things that didn't get done into another class period.
- One of the patterns I see emerging in my teaching is that my confidence level and ability to verbalize and clarify my ideas increases when I am sufficiently prepared and when I've created the presentation myself. Many times I have presented material that was originally created by someone else. Although I spent the time analyzing it and ensuring I understood it enough to teach it to someone else, it was still foreign. In the future I might consider taking the time to develop my own PowerPoint presentations when I teach as opposed to trying to understand someone else's.

Presentation

- According to my evaluations, I still say "um" too much during my presentations. This is obviously a pattern I'm seeing in my evaluations over the last year. During my doctoral

seminar this semester I noticed the difference between the presentation styles of the master's level students and the doctoral level students. More specifically, I noticed the master's level students said "um" a lot more in their presentations. I bring this up because I wonder if there is a change over time for most people who spend more time presenting. I understand that the first step to correcting this problem will most likely be to just be conscious of it, and try to remind myself before I present to watch out for it. I also feel that it is something that will begin to improve over time as I get more comfortable speaking in front of audiences.

- I got so caught up in making sure all the technology was working that I forgot the easiest one... plug it in. I'm not sure there is a specific strategy for correcting this mistake, but I also have a feeling it won't happen again. I suppose if I felt this was a pattern I could create a "to do" list for presentations, reminding myself of the things that might be simple to overlook in the midst of nervous preparation.

Activities

Interactive quiz

- I had to hold the receiver up in front of the classroom for so all the students' clickers had a clear shot. In the future I might find a way for the retriever to be mounted somewhere high enough that all the clickers have a clear view of it. On the evaluations, some of the students mentioned that it was annoying when their clicker didn't work. My guess is that either they didn't point them in the right direction or there was an obstruction between their clicker and the receiver.

- The interactive quiz was successful because it kept the students interacting with the content. In the future I might scatter the quiz questions throughout the presentation, rather than doing it all at once in order to get the students engaged at different points in time.

Tiered activity

- I would love to have spent more time on the tiered activity. I provided the students with informational reading to assist them in answering their “assigned” questions, but I didn’t see many students truly accessing those materials. Some of the students didn’t participate at all. I know participation varies no matter who the audience is, but I attest some of the lack of participation to the fact that this was an undergraduate level course. For example, only 30 of the 48 people in the class showed up. Many of the students are future general educators and may have felt the information did not directly apply to their learning needs. In the future I would allocate more time for the tiered activity and require the use of the printed materials. Collecting the papers might have been a way to get the students on task.

Discussion and Graphic Organizer

- The graphic organizer was just another way of representing the data the students had already found in the tiered activity. Trying to get students to share their answers was like pulling teeth. In the future I would (a) allow more time for the activity (b) have the students fill in the organizer by writing their answers on the board. We could then discuss what was written and would get the students out of their seats and keep them actively engaged.

Reflective Journaling

- The students were provided with plenty of time (5 minutes) to complete the journaling activity, yet still some of them only wrote two sentences. When I asked them to write, I didn't clearly specify that I wanted them to write for a full five minutes. In the future, I might set a timer and make it clear that they were to continue writing until the time was up. I might also consider using the activity at the beginning or middle of a class rather than the end so the students wouldn't be in such a hurry to get up and leave. If I was teaching a class I could use the beginning of each class period to reflect on the previous session's content.

References

Kingore, B. (2005). Tiered instruction: Beginning the process. Retrieved on April 4, 2007 from

<http://www.bertiekingore.com/tieredinstruct.htm>

Lieb, S. (1991). Principles of adult learning. Arizona Department of Health Services. Retrieved on March 13, 2007 from

<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/adults-2.htm>

National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum. (2002). Differentiated instruction:

Effective classroom practices report. Retrieved on March 13, 2007 from

<http://www.cast.org/system/galleries/download/ncac/DifInstruc.pdf>

Orkwis, R. (2003). Universally designed instruction. ERIC/OSEP Digest. Arlington, VA: ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education. Retrieved on April 4, 2007 from http://permanent.access.gpo.gov/websites/eric.ed.gov/ERIC_Digests/ed475386.htm

Valentino, C. (2000). Flexible grouping. Houghton Mifflin. Retrieved on April 4, 2007 from <http://www.eduplace.com/science/profdev/articles/valentino.html>