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<u>Assessing In A Comfortable Place Or Situation With Accommodations</u>

<u>Describe topic problem to be addressed & Rationale for why it is important with evidence from classroom</u>

The problem that needed to be addressed in my classroom was that one of my students would feel uncomfortable during assessments, and often times during whole group instruction. Not only would this affect that student's learning, but the class as a whole had been affected. This inquiry project was important to begin, because my time with the class was being monopolized. After winter break, this particular student began to shut down when he was uncomfortable or dislikes the assignment. Rather than facilitating the rest of the class, my attention needed to be directed toward him (often for large periods of time).

As my mentor teacher and I would talk about lessons taught, or my teaching, we began to focus more of our time talking about Isaiah. We decided we would begin taking notes of when Isaiah is energetic and ready to cooperate, and when he is frustrated and unwilling to participate. Isaiah became more a puzzle piece than before. Regardless of who was instructing, Isaiah expressed both unhappy and happy feelings. I noticed that Isaiah, during whole group instruction would sit in a corner and try to find a more comfortable spot. It was evident that when Isaiah was willing to work, he was capable of extraordinary work, yet when he was unwilling, he would not produce work at all. According to Stiggins and Kappan "students succeed academically only if they want to succeed and feel capable of doing so. If they lack either desire or confidence, they will not be successful" (1999, p. 191). My main concern was that Isaiah felt he was incapable of success, as I am a strong believer that all students want to learn. My mentor and I were determined to find when he was confident and when he felt as if he could succeed.

My mentor teacher and I decided to dig deeper and figure out the reasons why Isaiah may respond the way he does. We knew that he has sensory issues, and have been contemplating a CST due to his lack of interest and often time's defiance to do work.

<u>Intervention strategies from Research</u>

We started doing research on emotional imbalances, and certain actions, modifications or accommodations we could do in the classroom to help him become a confident learner all and every day. We found many ideas that were said to have helped in special needs cases, and with sensory issues. Much of the research found was based on assessing. We noticed that for Isaiah, assessment was a more difficult task. His confidence level when he was not interested, especially when we were assessing, was low- and according to Tom Schimmer (2012): "confidence plays a pivotal role in whether or not

students will have a productive response to being assessed" (p.1). Because we knew that confidence is imperative during assessment, and that assessments were worrisome to Isaiah, we began to look into accommodations for assessment.

Some strategies for assessing with Isaiah were, orally answering the questions on the test, and for Isaiah to be offered many tools to use during his test taking (Bolt, 2011). We found that he was specifically fond of using his writing binder to hide himself from the other students in the classroom during instruction, so this would be available for him during all assessments. To ensure we address his low self-esteem and sensory issues we continued to look into other accommodations for Isaiah. According to Sara E. Bolt (2011):

> Students may be unnecessarily distracted (or they may be distracting to other examinees) when tested in a large group, and therefore may need a small group or individual setting to better demonstrate their knowledge with respect to what is intended to be measured. Some other accommodations may necessitate the need for an alternate setting… having someone read aloud test items, or having oral responses dictated to a scribe. Other students may require specialized lighting, or special seating to be able to perform optimally. (p11)

After reading that there were many more accommodations we could offer Isaiah, my mentor teacher and I decided that other strategies for Isaiah would be to assess: individually, in a calm and quiet setting, assess in an area with less noise, and continue Isaiah allow him to orally answer the test questions.

Our last strategy was to involve Isaiah in the decision making. According to Gardner (2012), it is the learner who controls how engaged they are, and they are the one to decide how active they are within the lesson or learning (p. 128). My mentor and I figured involving him in deciding how we assess him would make for the strongest assessment possible, and allow Isaiah to be as comfortable as possible.

Valid ways to collect data

Our initial thoughts were to monitor Isaiah and try to understand him on a deeper level. My mentor and I began writing down any time Isaiah was expressing happy and cooperative emotions, or when he would hide in his shirt and sit head down on his desk for the remainder of the lesson. Notes were taken when he was and was not engaged or invested in the work or assessment. Not only did my mentor and I take notes of when Isaiah was invested or engaged, but we took pictures of his reactions, and began to compare the "highs and lows" of his emotions and responses.

We found that Isaiah was extrinsically motivated by our point system for good behavior (stop light system, and rewarded points for the day). We decided one way we could collect data on Isaiah's feelings, and how his reactions were as a whole, was to make a self-reflection behavior chart. He would fill it out at the end of the day, and the chart would be broken into 4 portions of the day (this way he could try to explain exactly why he was upset during a portion of learning time: subject specific times is what we were noticing were most difficult).

Lastly, assessment scores were to be taken and compared to those when he was in a whole group setting, and when he was working individually. This would give us insight on whether it was the content he disliked, if he was having trouble understanding the content, or if a setting change may be helpful.

Analysis of progress made from doing the assessed data collection

As I compared the assessments that Isaiah did with the whole class, or when he was assessed individually, the test scores did not give a clear representation of Isaiah feeling comfortable or emotionally stable.

	Tested Whole Class	Individualized Assessment
Math Unit 5 Test	Answered 3 questions	Answered all, 100% score
Science Formative Assessment	Answered all correctly	(was not necessary)
Writing Post On-Demand Assessment	Did not write	Did not write, 0% score
Math Unit 6 Test	Answered 1 question	Answered all, 100%
Morning Work (math)	Did not do the work	Took it home to work, and finished it all, 100% homework
Science Summative Assessment	Answered half	Finished exam, 100%

According to the assessments that I compared: Isaiah responded to the individualized intervention 66% of the time (correctly finishing 4/6 assessments), and did not respond well to the intervention 16% of the time (not finishing 1/6 assessments). The remaining assessment did not fit either category, because Isaiah did not need the individualized intervention assessment, he finished during whole class assessing.

Looking at the data, it is clear that Isaiah often felt comfortable enough to finish an assessment/assignment (regardless of if it was at home or in school) in an individualized setting or environment. I am puzzled why Isaiah felt comfortable during the formative assessment, and would not write even when in an individualized setting. As stated earlier, Isaiah needs to feel comfortable, successful and capable in order to produce anything in class, and I believe that the writing assessment either frustrated him, he was emotionally unstable, or felt as if he was not capable that date in time.

Although the data seems to show that overall Isaiah responds well to the intervention, it does not show how Isaiah would react during the individualized assessment. Isaiah would often put up a fight, hide in his shirt or desk, and would be unwilling to work at all (writing assessment is an example). This was one reason that the morning work was sent home for Isaiah to finish. My mentor and I knew that Isaiah felt more comfortable at home, and he would have success doing the work there.

After comparing the scores received in a whole group setting, and then again in a less stressful and comfortable setting, it became clear that Isaiah knew the content, but was just stressed, frustrated and uncomfortable working with others around, or without the direct response of a teacher to help guide him. Although this proves that Isaiah can retain the knowledge during whole group instruction,

and can produce the work during assessing, it still leaves my MT and I puzzled. Because most of Isaiah's actions are based on when he wants to do something, or is invested, it was unclear when he would be ready to work or not. As I planned lessons for the day, I began to think more about what may be well suited for the whole class, and something that Isaiah would want to participate in. Unfortunately, one activity would excite Isaiah, and then the next day the same type of thing would frustrate him. My MT and I have been looking more into his emotions and thoughts, rather than setting during instruction or assessment.

Strengths and weaknesses in your planned intervention

This intervention or inquiry project was changed specifically to suit the needs of one student, and I believe one weakness of that is that not all of my students benefitted directly from this. I believe that the intervention strategies planned worked well, but only when Isaiah was ready or willing to work. He often gets so upset and shuts down to where assessing even using those strategies becomes impossible. Another weakness in the planned intervention was the fact that it was not completely stable, and that based on how Isaiah felt or reacted, our strategy may or not be useful or even used.

A strength in these intervention strategies, and the accommodations adjusted for Isaiah, I believe is that my mentor and I really got to work one-on-one with Isaiah and understand him on a deeper level. Not only did we get to create a new bond with him, but I think he became more willing to verbalize his feelings and thoughts, after so much time was put into planning with him for his accommodations.

Feed back from MT

My mentor teacher was just as invested in this intervention and inquiry project as I was. She was supportive of my ideas and plans of action, and was very flexible if I would work with Isaiah one-on-one, or vice versa. My mentor is just as puzzled as I, and has more frequently been contacting Isaiah's mother to see if there was something that may change his mood in the mornings, just to get a feel for how the day started off.

Analysis of why you think you obtained the results you did, and with evidence.

Unfortunately, as we looked at our results, it did not have a clear pattern. Our results continue to be unclear, as many activities that Isaiah is interested in one day, may upset him the next. His behaviors are often unreliable in regards to how he will react to an assignment or activity. Luckily he have learned that his sensitivity to sensory perception does affect his ability or willingness to participate. We realize that we need to continue working with Isaiah as often as we can, especially during assessment.

After time passed, and my MT and I informed Isaiah that working and learning was not a choice his test results began to show improvement. More often his entire demeanor was uplifting rather than disruptive and scared. When given an assessment with the whole class, Isaiah would either not fill in any, or would do minimal work, due to frustration. Yet some days, when pulled aside and working in a

quiet environment with just one person next to him, he began to show exactly how bright he is. Although it depended on the subject (writing and math were more frustrating to him), Isaiah began to sit closer to the class in the meeting area, rather than under his chair. The evidence obtained showed me that the intervention strategies that were chosen did indeed help Isaiah when assessing, but it depended completely on when he was emotionally stable and his senses were not being overstimulated.

How did the learning community change, or was it affected

The students in my class have noticed a change in the classroom, especially when Isaiah is unwilling to work. Many of them are worried about him, and have asked me if he is doing alright. Luckily, the community feel our classroom has helped tremendously, as students are very willing to help or encourage Isaiah to work. Students have noticed the different chair that Isaiah sits in, and have worked well by not pointing out the differences between them and him. Because my mentor teacher and I noticed successful assessing when Isaiah was pulled out and independently assessed, we have continued that with other students as well, with optimistic results.

Conclusions and implications for teaching next year

I learned that there are many students that may be bypassed for needing special accommodations during instruction or assessment. After reading Pierangelo and Giuliani's Understanding Assessment in the Special Education Process: A Step-by-Step Guide for Educators , I learned that students who experience "high achievement scores and high school abilities index with a history of low academic performance, a history of excessive absences, frequent difficulty separating from parent at the start of a school day (more serious symptom after age 6 or 7), and a history of feeling powerless in his approach to problems" can often times be reason to begin investigating students specific needs in order to be successful (2008, p.12). I realized that when there is one student who has special needs or accommodations, it may be necessary to implement them for other students as often as possible.

I noticed that these intervention strategies were designed specifically for this year. It is uncommon for there to be two teachers in a room, and so these strategies and the accessibility of open rooms and resources may not be as readily available as they were this year. I do, however, intend to use what I did and learned to help with assessing strategies for years to come.

Learning community that still needs to be developed

Although this inquiry project was based off an individual student's needs, it affected the learning community as a whole. Not only were other students able to continue working diligently and without interruptions, but Isaiah was able to work one-on-one with me and my MT. I believe that in order for this inquiry project to continue to affect my students directly or indirectly, the same sense of community and trust needs to be enforced in class, and our students needs have to be addressed specifically for our assessment data to be as correct or clear as possible. Our research and work toward understanding our students needs to continue to develop in order for our students to be as successful as possible.

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