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How Self-Regulated Strategy Development In Writing Eases The Transition From Special Education To Regular Education For Students With Learning Disabilities

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HOW SELF-REGULATED STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT IN WRITING EASES THE

TRANSITION FROM SPECIAL EDUCATION TO REGULAR EDUCATION FOR

STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

by

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Overview

Sitting down to work on this first chapter produces the same feelings of tension and anxiety as I felt as a child. I am using my tried and true ways to avoid fear of failure. So I practice. My brain is flooded with ideas for things that I could be doing other than putting my fingers to the keys. Many are not important or needed, and most aren't even close to fun. I try to look back to a single incident that has made writing such a chore and anxiety-provoking. Instead, I am only reminded of little things that together continue to make me feel like a frustrated elementary student. Many times I see this same frustration in my students. I see the many ways that they try to avoid the work that has been a source of pain and failure for them. Even though I can relate to them, I cannot allow them to run from their work. As a teacher, it is my job to give tools to my students that will assist them in school and be carried through life. But, I cannot give them the right tools if I do not use them myself. Through the development of my capstone, my goal is to create a curriculum that will support students as they develop as writers. I will sort through my own tool box, take out the tools I have needed and clean them up. I will also look for some new tools and decide which ones will help my students not only get the job done, but also write with aptitude and confidence. Through my research I would like to answer the following question: *How does self-regulated strategy development in writing ease the the transition from special education to regular education for students with learning disabilities?*

My Story

As a child, I can remember pretending to be a teacher. One of our neighbors was a retired teacher. I can still see the bright blue print from the extra mimeographed worksheets that she gave me to use. I enjoyed being in the attic of the big white house, preparing lessons in which I knew all the answers. Being a student in real life was not nearly as enjoyable or successful. I struggled academically as well as socially. I am an only child of parents who didn't enjoy school. They did not know the procedures and hidden rules of the small town, upper-middle-class school where the way you were treated depended on your last name, who you knew, and what work your parents did. That is not to say that my parents did not see getting an education as important. They believed exactly the opposite. They wanted me to do well in school but relied heavily on hope that the school system would have the skills and integrity to do the best for me. If this didn't happen, they did not know how or when to step in. Many times they weren't even aware that they could help make a necessary change since they had the same type of experiences in school themselves.

Most of the memories I have from school come in small snippets that showcase how I did not fit in. Living out in the country and having two working parents made it difficult to participate in activities with other children my age. While other kids were together after school building friendships, I was usually with adults or alone.

Now, when I see my students struggling to turn assignments in on time, I remember myself trying to complete a project and not having the materials or not quite understanding the directions and not having someone to help me. For example, one

project that we were given was to use a bar of Ivory soap to carve something. I can't remember why we were given the assignment but I can clearly remember the simple fish that I made. I have vivid memories of calling my mom at work and begging her to stop on her way home to buy me another bar. It still makes me feel guilty for asking her to add another task to her already packed schedule.

The fish that I attempted to make more interesting by coloring it with a blue marker went to school with me the next morning. One student's sculpture, and it could only be called a sculpture, was of a detailed frog. She was complimented by everyone who saw her beautiful work. At the time, I felt jealous and even mad because I was sure she had help from at least one of her parents. I never did find out if she had a lot of help or just guidance and support. At this point in my life, it should not have mattered. But the experience allows me to justify taking a step back from what I am trying to help a student learn. When all they can think about is how they are going to complete an assignment for another class, a plan or solution is the only thing that will get them ready to learn something new.

I often hear complaints made by my colleagues about students not completing homework or the lack of support at home. They make statements like, "How should we expect a student to do well if their parents don't even care?" As a child, I was aware of similar comments being made about my family. My teachers probably were feeling bad for me. What they didn't realize was that it would have been better if they had found out what I needed and given me support. Pity and assumptions do not help people succeed. Understanding, encouragement, and high expectations will.

However, I did know in my heart, even as young as I was in junior high school, that students like me were not receiving the educational experience they deserved. I knew that I needed support but did not have a clue how to get it. It is not that I did not reach out to those adults that I felt could help. They just did not respond. Even as I slipped a note into an envelope on the counselor's door requesting a time to meet with her, I had few expectations that she would do so. Sadly, I was right. She was busy with her groups and organizations, with the kids who did well in school. The kids who needed her the least were the ones who consumed her time.

I got through school and graduated even though it was a struggle. Rather than discouraging me from teaching, my experiences actually made me want to be a teacher even more. I wanted students to have at least one person at school who could help guide them through the process of learning while keeping their self esteem intact even if things got difficult.

No matter what I am teaching my students, the foundation is based on getting to know my students well and building strong relationships with them and their families. Students need to feel respected and safe in order to learn anything. Parents need to feel that they are an important part of a team that puts the needs of their child above all else. This is especially important with parents of children who did not feel like they had a say in their own education.

Special Education

In Minnesota, children who qualify can receive services under one or more area: math, reading, and written language. When students are formally evaluated to see if they qualify for special education services in the area of written language, they are assessed in single word spelling, in fluency of production, and in quality of expression. The subtests are only used to evaluate these skills individually. Writing assignments in school are generally graded on all these areas and more.

From my experience working with students who have difficulty with writing, I have discovered that they often struggle with part to whole learning. They need to see the end result and then learn about the pieces. Teachers often teach each piece individually without explaining what the pieces come together to make. By the time students get to third grade, they have been repeatedly told that they need to check their work for correct punctuation and capitalization. When these students are given a writing assignment, they become overwhelmed with the thought of following all the rules while coming up with something to say. Their voice is often lost. They will limit the words they use to those that they can spell. The punctuation will either be nonexistent or randomly placed.

By the time students with written language disabilities enter the upper elementary grades, they have used so much mental energy on just getting some ideas on paper that they don't even think about going back to edit. They are told to check for correct punctuation and spelling. I can remember being told to do this. In my head I was thinking, "What does that mean?" Many times the frustration was apparent in the teacher's voice when the direction was given again and again. The struggle for me and

for a lot of my students as well is that they never learn the rules for correct punctuation. Sometimes students can rattle off the types of words that need to be capitalized, but do not know how to put that into practice. Others may know that the first letter of a sentence needs to be capitalized, but won't remember the rule for their own writing.

When a student qualifies for special education services under the area of Specific Learning Disabilities, the goal is to provide extra support until the student can be successful in the regular education curriculum. The support should be designed to parallel regular education and should only be short term. My capstone project is to design a curriculum that answers the following question: *How does self-regulated strategy development in writing ease the the transition from special education to regular education for students with learning disabilities? Powerful Writing Strategies for all Students,* the authors described self-regulation as having students use goal setting, self-instructions, and self-monitoring.

Conclusion

Through literature review, I will discover the best ways to assist special education students with specific learning disabilities in the area of written language be successful in regular education when the special education support is removed.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

My K-12 education was extremely difficult especially when writing was involved. Students with learning disabilities in written language in grades 3-5 struggle with writing. However, being able to get ideas across to others through writing is important. Through literature reviews and research, I plan to focus on the following themes in order to answer my research question: *How does self-regulated strategy development in writing ease the the transition from special education to regular education for students with learning disabilities?* I plan to incorporate the Minnesota Writing Standards for grades 3-5. I will explore the types of writing instruction that best supports special education students as they prepare to transition to regular education and how teachers can increase independence and confidence in elementary students as they write. Throughout this chapter, I will review literature from experts in the fields of elementary and special education related to expectations of intermediate writers, developing strong relationships with students, and improving students' confidence in their writing while increasing independence.

Writing Standards

In Minnesota, the Language Arts Standards K-12 are a combination of the Common Core Standards with identified additional knowledge and skills in order to address particular legislative requirements and better reflect research and evidence-based best practices in English Language Arts (MDE). The Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects K–5 also

include standards in reading, writing, speaking, viewing, listening, media literacy, and language use (MDE). The writing standards identify and address the fundamentals of writing which are, to persuade, explain, or convey real or imagined experiences. Also included in the standards are skills required for specific types of writing, such as argumentative, informative, and explanatory texts, and narratives across texts and classrooms.

The Writing Benchmarks are divided into the following categories: Text Types and Purposes, Writing Process: Production and Distribution of Writing, Research to Build and Present Knowledge, and Range of Writing. In addition to standards concerning how to write, standards related to using writing as a tool for learning are also included. As the grade levels increase, the benchmarks add additional skills and expectations which allow teachers to scaffold from previous learning (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010).

In grades 3-5 in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (Minnesota Department of Education), students are expected to learn to write for multiple purposes as well as use writing to recall, organize, analyze, interpret, and build knowledge about content in every subject area (Graham, 2012). Graham and some practicing teachers stated that a problem with the CCSS is that benchmarks are based mostly on educated guesses and assume that all students will work toward the same goals within the same grade. They recommend that teachers have a strong understanding of how writing develops and value its importance. Next, I will discuss students who qualify for special education.

Special Education in the Classroom

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provided that "specific learning disability" means "a disorder in 1 or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations" (year, p. ?). Such term "includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia" (source, year, p. ?). Such term does not include "a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage" (20 U.S.C Section 1401 (30).

The Learning Disabilities Association of America (2012) gave the practical definition of learning disabilities as follows:

The term "learning disabilities", sometimes referred to as specific learning disabilities, is an umbrella term that covers a range of neurologically based disorders in learning and various degrees of severity of such disorders.Broadly speaking, these disorders involve difficulty in one or more, but not uniformly in all, basic psychological processes: (1) input (auditory and visual perception), (2) integration (sequencing, abstraction, and organization), (3) memory (working, short term, and long term memory), (4) output (expressive language), and (5) motor (fine and gross motor). Learning disabilities vary from individual to

individual and may present in a variety of ways. Learning disabilities may manifest as difficulty: (1) processing information by visual and auditory, means, which may impact upon reading, spelling, writing, and understanding or using language, (2) prioritizing, organizing, doing mathematics, and following instructions, (3) storing or retrieving information from short or long term memory, (4) using spoken language, and (5) clumsiness or difficulty with handwriting. (p. 1)

In the state of Minnesota, students who qualify for special education services under the area of learning disabilities for written language are writing at least two grade levels behind their same grade peers. There is much more to the qualifying process than this, and the data between their ability and performance is only one piece of the puzzle. However, I mention the grade level issue for a couple of reasons. I have heard this model referred by many as the deficit model. With the introduction of the "Response to Intervention" model, the hope is that students who struggle will get additional support before they fall two years behind and qualify for special education. According to the RTI Action Network (2017), a program of the National Center for Learning Disabilities, RTI is defined as follows.

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs. The RTI process begins with high-quality instruction and universal screening of all children in the general education classroom. Struggling learners are provided with interventions at increasing levels of intensity to accelerate their rate of learning. These services may

be provided by a variety of personnel, including general education teachers, special educators, and specialists. Progress is closely monitored to assess both the learning rate and level of performance of individual students. Educational decisions about the intensity and duration of interventions are based on individual student response to instruction. RTI is designed for use when making decisions in both general education and special education, creating a well-integrated system of instruction and intervention guided by child outcome data. (p. 1)

In addition to special education services, students will be receiving grade level language arts instruction with accommodations and modifications for support while they are developing the needed skills. The curriculum focus will be on helping students with the writing process. There are many other areas of writing that should also be covered with students with learning disabilities, but these areas are outside the scope of this capstone.

Writing Process

Writing experts agreed that teaching the writing process to all students is important, but especially critical if the student struggles (Calkins, 1986; Collins, 1998; Fountas & Pinnell, 2007; Morris, 2013). Even though the titles vary for each part of the process, these experts pointed out that the writing process should be recursive rather than linear. Rief (2015) described the process well, "Writing is a complex process through which the writer moves recursively, shifting back and forth among steps of finding ideas, rehearsing, drafting, revising, editing and publishing" (p. 4). The parts of the process that

I will discuss in the curriculum are as follows: prewriting/planning/brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing.

Students with learning disabilities often do not realize that there is a process for writing. Morris (2013) noted in her book *RTI Meets Writer's Workshop,* that this was not surprising to her because many of the teachers she surveyed, or talked and worked with, did not teach the writing process. They also felt that teaching writing was hard and that they were not comfortable teaching the many skills that need to be taught (2013, pp. 71, 75).

Collins suggested that writing development is a journey that teaching the writing process linearly can hold struggling writers at one developmental level. It is better to assist students use the current routes, or strategies and skills, to assist in reaching a new destination (1998). When first introducing struggling students to the writing process, care should be taken to ensure that students understand that writing is recursive rather than steps to be followed every time they write.

Brainstorming/Pre-writing/Planning. Students with learning disabilities often struggle with knowing how to plan and why it is important. "They mostly plan while they write," stated Graham (2005, p. 14). Even when given time to plan for a writing task, such students often do not use the time well. They turn a "narrative prompt" into a question followed by a simple reply or two. Students with learning disabilities also have difficulty accessing their knowledge when working independently. For example, when students were specifically told which parts of a piece of writing needed additional content, they were able to access the relevant knowledge and apply it to their writing.

Many students benefit from using other options to plan rather than a piece of notebook paper. Margot Galt suggested using a big sheet of blank paper where students can draw pictures or webs and put their thoughts down in a nontraditional way (Galt, 1992, p. 5). Students often enjoy using different types of writing utensils like markers and pens in fun colors. Offering ways to plan or prewrite may help overcome some fears that students have experienced as writers in the past (Calkins, 1986; Galt, 1992). Perhaps the novelty of getting to choose what they use may be a way to jumpstart creativity. Using utensils to write that cannot be erased can also be freeing (Galt, 1992).

Strategies for generating ideas should be taught (Graham & Harris, 2008). Depending on the preference of each student, these strategies can be used so frequently that they become automatic and meet students' specific needs. Most students are familiar with list making. At first, the teacher can give the title for the list and include subheadings as needed (Collins, 1998). It is important to reinforce with students that complete sentences and punctuation are not needed. This may be difficult at first, but it will allow the student to get more ideas down.

For students who have difficulty writing things linearly, a web might be a better option (Galt, 1992). Generally, the topic is put in the center with ideas related to the topic being radiating out from the center. When deciding how much of the web should be completed by the class as a whole before giving it to the student, the student's experience with webbing should be considered. Adding a graphic related to the topic is a simple but novel addition that can add motivation and trigger background knowledge to generate more ideas. For example, students who like to draw, can create a scene for the story they

are going to write. This picture can be part of the planning step. Story picture cards and cubes are also a fun way to help students develop a basic storyline to begin the writing process. The key is for students to take ownership of a strategy that works best for them.

Drafting. Drafting is where most special education students begin the writing process (Calkins, 1986; Graham & Harris, 2001). For special education students, once they are given a topic or a writing prompt, they just begin writing. Once they get down everything they can think of, they feel that they are done. When they are reminded to read it over, they fix some basic mechanics and decide that they are finished with the paper. Students need to realize that this is just one step and students can be reminded that they are not finished at this point.

During drafting, students can discover the best way for them to get their thoughts on paper. Students with learning disabilities generally struggle with the basic skills of writing. Lower-level skills like spelling, handwriting, punctuation, and other skills needed for getting language on paper, require so much mental energy that the writing process of planning and content generation stalls and stops. "The best writing not only gives us voice, it is filled with voice," (Rief, 2015, p. 7).

All students need to be exposed to many types of writing (Calkins, 1986; Cruz, 2015; Fountas & Pinnell, 2006; Morris, 2013). They also need to become aware of ways that writing is used in everyday life for many different purposes. They need to hear how different genres and types of writing sound (Calkins, 1986; Cruz, 2015; Fountas & Pinnell, 2006; Morris, 2013). It is key that they see and hear examples of such texts to advance their writing (Graham & Harris, 2005). Since the focus of this capstone is

helping students who receive special education services to develop as writers who no longer need additional support beyond the mainstream. The curriculum being written as a part of this capstone will be designed to be for special education students who also participate in a mainstream language arts classes, as stated by Morris (2013).

Revising. Fountas and Pinnell also made a point to state that writing is a recursive process that even though the the components take place in a kind of of linear way the writer can use any or all of the components (2007). They reduce the key phases to four pairs of components into one. They combined drafting and revising and state that there is a limited number of ways to draft and revise text. Students use them throughout the grades and begin by producing a draft, then rereading to remember what they wrote, adding, deleting, and reorganizing information. Writers use tools and techniques they have acquired to change the text as they use mentor texts and advice from peer reviewers (Fountas & Pinnell, 2007).

Difficulties with revising for students with learning disabilities seem to be connected with their ideas about what makes good writing (Collins, 1998; Graham & Harris, 2005). When asked, they tend to focus mostly on mechanics. They do not realize that revising is actually editing. When students with learning disabilities are asked to revise their writing, they usually just make their papers neater and fix some mechanical errors (Collins, 1998: Graham & Harris, 2005). It may be easier for teachers to check students' writing for correct spelling and punctuation. Often the only comments teachers make on their papers are related to these concrete skills. This reinforces the belief that such skills are what make a writing good.

Either as part of or in addition to, sharing should be used to help students expand on their writing (Collins, 1998). Even having the chance to hear what they have on the paper can lead to additional ideas. Students with learning disabilities are able to verbalize more than they can initially put on paper (Collins, 1998; Graham & Harris, 2005). Making copies of the drafts for the listeners to follow along with can help find the missing pieces that the author intended to put down.

Good writers, or born writers, are clear about the writing process even when it is not explicitly taught; however, this is not the case with struggling writers (Collins, 1998). The process needs to be very clearly explained and reinforced until students understand all. Students will benefit from visual reminders of the steps and things to consider during each part of the process. Graphic organizers either on paper or assistive devices may be helpful for some (Calkins, 1986; Cruz, 2015; Fountas & Pinnell, 2006; Morris, 2013). In order for them to be beneficial to students, their use must be clearly explained and the organizer itself should have reminders built into it. Also, not every student needs the same organizer (Cruz, 2015, p. 28).

Many students like creating a story using one or more pictures. The pictures can be created by the students or they can be on cards. The pictures work as "anchors" for different parts of the story, so that the student has something to look at while writing (Collins, 1998; Graham & Harris, 2005). Students with learning disabilities have difficulty with short term and working memory. By having picture cues, students do not have to rely on memory. These visual cues also can lead to an increase in the amount of text that a student writes. Also having someone to listen as a student tells the story based

on the pictures can also help struggling students to add more to their writing, especially when the listener takes notes of what the students says.

Revision is key to enriching the content of writing, as it makes the information more vivid for the reader and shares the true voice of the student. Since students with learning disabilities often confuse revision with editing, the benefits of revision must be explicitly taught. Because writing is recursive, repetitive use of the revision strategy will increase students' familiarity with revision and how it can improve their writing.

Blending the components of Language Arts

The Common Core State Standards in Language Arts are written with the expectation that standards should be taught throughout all classes and together, rather than in isolation (MDE, 2017). In my opinion, the transition to teaching Language Arts as a whole, rather than in separate parts, is not only a huge change in mindset for teachers in other subject areas but also for many language arts teachers as well. In elementary school, the classroom teachers often have to teach all subject areas. Teacher preparatory classes in college probably included a class in teaching the various subject areas, but they were only taught basic subject matter with little if any focus on the types of writing students needed to participate in these subjects. The teaching of writing was included with the teaching of the language arts block and focused mostly on writing essays and other narratives. As mentioned previously, teachers don't often feel comfortable teaching writing, and writing for specific subjects adds another level of difficulty (Morris, 2013).

Self-Regulatory Strategy Development

A big part of being successful in school is understanding how schools work. Public schools are designed primarily for white, middle class students whose parents know what white middle class teachers expect in school. For students who do not have such knowledge and support before entering school, such hidden rules can be like playing a board game without knowing the rules beforehand. The games are created in a way that does not consider what their students bring to school both culturally and linguistically as strengths (Hollie, 2012). Students are expected to play the game while trying to learn how to do by observing others. Some students will slowly catch on but will always lag behind. Others will give up and refuse to play, then misbehave so they do not have to play. A few might try to blend into the background or have others carry them along. The explicit teaching of curriculum is accepted as best practice. Yet, if the students do not understand the foundational rules for being in school, they will have difficulty understanding the curriculum, no matter how it is taught.

Strategies should be taught for the writing process as well as for self-regulation. Many of the foundational rules of school are linked to self-regulation as well sharing the same perception on key concepts. For example, students have different ideas about what it means to be on time and prepared for class. Most teachers in traditional schools feel that in order to be considered "on time and prepared," students should be in their seats, with needed materials out, and ready to start class as soon as the bell rings. For many students, "being on time" is not as concrete as this. They feel that being on time is the same as having part of their body in the room when the bell rings. Others, feel that if they

have peeked in the room, they should be counted as "on time." It is very important that

all students know and understand what the classroom expectations are.

Learning conditions

Brian Cambourne's name was new to me as I began doing research for this

capstone. I first came across a brief mention of his theory in *Read Write Teach* by Linda

Rief (2016). The brief mention of his theory, Conditions of Learning, led me to search

out additional information about Cambourne. Reading about his research not only excited

me, but also validated my beliefs about students and the type of teacher I strive to be.

Cambourne (1995) was driven to find an educationally relevant theory because, as

a teacher, he did not understand how students who learned many difficult skills outside of

school still struggled with learning reading and writing inside school. He reviewed data

related to learning via the oral mode of language. Since examples of children who did not

learn oral language yet had no neurological or genetic deficits were identified, it became

apparent that language learning occurred not just because human brains evolved to have

that capacity, but was contingent on environmental factors and/or other conditions.

Cambourne decided to discover the conditions that enable humans to learn language.

The conditions he found were: 1) immersion, 2) demonstration,

3) engagement, 4) expectations, 5) responsibility, 6) approximations,

7) employment, 8) response (Cambourne, 1995). He asked for assistance from colleagues

to see if these conditions applied to literacy teaching and learning. He, along with

practicing teachers, discovered that these conditions do apply to literacy learning, with

"engagement" being the primary condition for learning language (p. 186). Other

conditions work together to create the best environment for learning. Discussion with others as well as personal reflection about our learning are key to improved learning in a safe learning community (Cambourne, 1995).

After years of advocating that teachers apply his learning theory, Cambourne was asked, "Isn't one requirement of a good theory its ability to explain why learning sometimes fails to occur?" (Cambourne, 2001, p. 784). He asked some research students to look at why sometimes "normal" students failed to learn. The reasons they found included faulty demonstrations, lack of engagement, fear of failure to learn the material because the discourse in the classroom made the process seem difficult; poor feedback that sent the wrong message, and students own inability or refusal to take responsibility for their learning. Cambourne stated the following:

> This month I have reported the results of applying to my theory a principle first espoused by William of Ockham some 700 years ago. The results support the notion that this theory is robust enough to explain both the successful and unsuccessful learning of reading [and writing]. William of Ockham would probably have agreed that when learning fails to occur in seemingly normal people it can be explained as a breakdown in the processes that underpin effective learning, rather than as a theory of personal or cultural deficit. (2001, p. 786)

This quote reinforces my belief that when a student struggles, we as teachers need to look at instruction and how we teach first. Many times we blame a student or factors in a student's life for failure. It is not to say that outside factors do not have an impact on

learning. We do need to consider these factors, but we also still need to teach with the belief that the student can learn.

Strategy Instruction

Strategy is defined as "a careful plan or method for achieving a particular goal usually over a long period of time or the skill of making or carrying out plans to achieve a goal" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Research shows that the method for teaching writing that had the largest effect size is the teaching of writing strategies for planning, drafting, revising and editing a variety of text types. However when the type of strategy that was taught was considered, the "self-regulated strategy development" (SRSD) model (Harris & Graham, 1996) had the highest effect size. The SRSD model builds on the explicit teaching of writing strategies for the writing process, especially planning and revising, by adding self-regulating strategies to increase independent use of the strategies. The type of support and feedback are adjusted, based on students' individual needs. Students are encouraged to collaborate on their learning while setting goals. They are also encouraged to recognize the importance of effort, weaving a recursive learning process of going back again and again to correct, expand, modify and shape a piece of writing. (Graham, 2013).

A strategy specifies a course of action (Graham, 2005, p. 10). In the book, *Powerful Writing Strategies for all Students,* the authors described self-regulation as having students use goal setting, self-instructions, and self-monitoring. The properties of goals that they consider critical are, specificity, difficulty, and proximity. The student should provide a clear indication of what is required to complete the task. The goals should be set at a level of difficulty that is not too easy or too difficult. The students

should have the ability to achieve the goal with it having some challenge but not so difficult that the student gives up. Goals should be able to be completed in a short amount of time so that the student will have to check their progress often and decide if any change in action is needed.

The six types of self-instruction discussed by the authors begin with problem definition where students must decide what they need to do and define the task (Graham, 2005). Focusing attention and planning requires the development of statements to help students' focus their attention and develop their plan.

Students also need to decide which strategy they will implement as well as review the steps for using the strategy. It is important for students to develop self-talk to help them cope with the difficulty of a writing task and exercise their self-control. They must also learn how to remind themselves of the progress they are making through self-reinforcement.

As students progress toward goal attainment, they need to do self-assessment and record their progress. By learning strategies for self-regulation, students begin to realize that they control their success. Students often blame others or the situation for their failure. Learning that the choices they make has the greatest impact not only makes them feel more in control but can be empowering as well.

Conclusion

Writing is a recursive process that goes beyond just writing, editing, and a completed project. All students need to learn that there is a process but struggling writers need the support of learning which behaviors and thought processes they need to regulate

and how to accomplish that. Teachers who get to know their students needs and explicitly

teach them the strategies they need will help students successfully transfer their learning

to the mainstream classroom as well as think of themselves as writers. The research used

in this chapter will be used as a guide to create curriculum and materials in the project to

move from being told exactly what they need to write to being more independent writers

who are strategic and answer the following question; *How does self-regulated strategy*

development in writing ease the the transition from special education to regular

education for students with learning disabilities? Chapter three introduces the methods

used for the research project including the design, curriculum method, assessments, as

well as the setting.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

In Chapter One I presented the following question; *How does self-regulated strategy development in writing ease the the transition from special education to regular education for students with learning disabilities?* and provided a rationale. In Chapter Two, I shared research on this subject and discovered important ideas that I must consider as I develop my curriculum. Writing teachers need to change their stance on teaching writing as just looking at the students' end products. They must see themselves as coaches who guide students throughout the process (Calkins, 1986). In turn, students must learn how to regulate their behavior during this process while the teacher scaffolds the support they need. The more challenges a student has with writing, the more explicit the teaching and support must be (Graham, Harris, Mason, & Friedlander, 2008). As a special education teacher for students with learning disabilities, I see how students do not realize there is a writing process and are not able to identify the behaviors that prevent them from improving their work. These observations have giving me a rationale for creating a curriculum that answers the question; *How does self-regulated strategy development in writing ease the the transition from special education to regular education for students with learning disabilities?*

Audience and Setting

The target audience for this project is students in third through fifth grade students with learning disabilities within a pull-out group consisting of six to twelve students. The

site is within a school district with five elementary schools. The elementary school has

approximately 575 students with a variety of backgrounds including many students

whose first language is Somali. The demographics of the school were taken from the

Minnesota Department of Education Report Card dated the Spring of 2017. They are as

follows; 5% Hispanic/Latino, 0.5% American Indian/Alaskan Native, 2.6% Asian,

70.3% Black/African American, 14.9% White, 6.6% two or more races. Students

receiving some type of special education services is 16.7%. The setting for this project

consists of flexible seating with a variety of workspaces. Students have access to a device

with word processing, text to speech, and speech to text capabilities.

Curriculum Approach

Students with learning disabilities often have confidence in their ability to write

but their idea about what makes writing "good" in incorrect. They feel that by writing

down their thoughts when given the prompt and then fixing some spelling errors and

adding punctuation is all that is involved. Their confidence interferes with the ability to

critique their writing. They are not aware that there are many parts to the writing process

that writers use to make "good" writing. Learning disabilities are often exacerbated by

difficulties with self regulation like impulsivity, staying on task, and motivation. Students

with learning disabilities must learn strategies for the writing process and self-regulation

(Graham & Harris, 2005).

Curriculum Framework

The curriculum framework used in the unit and lesson design for this capstone is

Understanding by Design (UbD) framework. This framework was designed by Wiggins

and McTighe (2011) and uses "Backwards Design". Course design is developed by looking at the goal first and then working backwards to the activities and assessment. Since planning begins by considering the overarching goals first, the UbD design is a more intentional way to plan lessons. This design takes the focus from teaching to focus on learning which leads to transference of the material (Bowen, 2017).

Curriculum

The curriculum will include a checklist for teachers to identify the self-regulatory needs of the students in their class. It will also include two strategy lessons using the Self-Regulatory Strategy Development model. One will be a lesson for a strategy relating to the writing process and the other will be for self-regulation. Possibilities for combining the strategies will also be discussed. Additional strategies for the writing process and self-regulation will also be discussed for the common difficulties of students with learning disabilities.

Santangelo stated (2014) students with learning disabilities struggle with the planning stage in writing because knowledge is difficult. It is not necessarily due to the lack of background knowledge but the problem of accessing it. They also are not aware that there is a process to writing. Planning is also hindered by students inability to coordinate and execute a plan.

Text production difficulties make the entire process of writing difficult for most students with learning disabilities. Their writing is often shorter because they have difficulty generating and transcribing. The content is less linguistically and syntactically complex. Mistakes in capitalization, spelling, grammar, and language usage also

interfere. The produce text at approximately half the rate of peers without disabilities. Their poor handwriting is illegible which makes their revision difficult for both themselves and others. In addition, poor working memory makes retention of ideas difficult.

Chapter three introduces the methods used for the research project including the design, curriculum method, assessments, as well as the setting that was planned prior to completing the project. Chapter four describes the capstone project from the beginning of the process through completion. It will include major learnings, challenges and limitations, communicating the results, and ideas for future research.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusions

Introduction

This capstone project was created with the overriding belief that all students can succeed with the right guidance, support, strong belief in their current abilities along with an understanding of their needs and with the ability to encourage themselves to improve. This project may focus on improving writing using the writing process but the ability to self-regulate is important to so many areas of our lives that the learning from this project can be a springboard for other academic areas to building positive relationships as well as improved mental health. I began this process with the goal of answering the question: *How does self-regulated strategy development in writing ease the the transition from special education to regular education for students with learning disabilities?;* however I discovered so much more. Throughout this chapter, I will discuss the development of my project including the surprises, challenges, and major learnings.

In Chapter One, I shared my history in school and with writing. It was hard for me during my K-12 education and still is for me to write formally. Deciding what I wanted to learn more about was not difficult. I knew that I wanted to help my students become better writers but I also wanted to improve my own. This led to the research that I discuss in Chapter Two.

Doing the research for chapter two was the fun part. I was excited to learn from the experts in regular and special education about how to help students become better and more confident writers. The first task was for me to narrow my topic and decide on a

manageable amount of information to process and utilize for my project. This continued to be a difficulty to me throughout the process. Even though I enjoyed reading the research, I struggled with writing the capstone and was amazed at how quickly the old anxieties about writing resurfaced. I had to remind myself that understanding the struggle that students face is extremely beneficial. The reminders did not always work and sometimes I felt like my emotional development reverted to the same level as many adolescents. The next challenge that I faced was being transferred from working with elementary students to working with high school students. At this point, I started to panic. Luckily for me, the capstone project was another option to the thesis. It was still difficult at times to look through my elementary teacher lense when I was working with students who needed me to utilize my developing high school lense. As I began to formulate in my mind and prepare for writing Chapter Three, new issues began to show themselves.

Just thinking back to the writing of Chapter Three, makes me uncomfortable. If someone wanted to torture me without physical contact, asking me to write expository text of length that includes citing would be up there on the list. During research, I found that I am not alone in my discomfort of teaching writing. Morris stated that when she interviewed elementary teachers about how they taught writing, many could not give a clear process and many felt that they lack the ability to teach writing to their students (2013). The teachers that she interviewed were classroom teachers who are the first line of instruction for all students. Graham and Harris stated that the way writing is currently taught in most elementary classes, only the best or natural writers will discover that there is a process used when writing (2001, 2005). When completing their meta-analysis of the

research on teaching writing in the elementary schools, Graham, McKeown, Kiuhara, and Harris found that understanding that there is a recursive writing process was key for all students' success (2012). When you add in the challenge of a learning disability, writing teachers must add the teaching of self-regulation to the process.

Major Learnings

I learned multiple things during the completion of my capstone. Some things relate mostly to the teaching of students with learning disabilities yet many things will benefit all students. I will discuss the information that I feel with have the most impact on my teaching as well as other topics that I would like to learn more about.

I learned about the writing process and teaching the variety of genre types while reinforcing that the process is recursive is the foundation for writing instruction. Prior to my research, my belief that teaching the writing process was important but did not realize it was not linear. Brushing your teeth is a linear process. You can't switch the order and get the same results plus the process in finite even though we repeat the process. Writing is more fluid. Obviously, you can't start with editing if you don't have a first draft; however, you can repeatedly go back and revise and even brainstorm. You can always improve or change writing. The options are infinite. Discovering that the writing process was more random helped me understand more about how I was restricting my own writing.

The key idea that I learned during the writing of the curriculum was the importance of teaching students self-regulation for writing to students in order for them to succeed in the mainstream. When I think of this concept now, I realize that as a special

educator this concept should have been obvious. Students with learning disabilities often struggle with self-regulation in so many other school concepts that their struggles with it in writing should have been a given.

A discovery that I understand and believe has also left me with a conundrum to solve. As a reading specialist, everything I read states the importance of students having access to books that are at their reading level. It never crossed my mind that this was also true for writers. Of course students need to hear and read mentor texts for basic structure but the concept of having models available at their writing level gave me pause. Ideally, exemplars should be created at their instructional level by using the student's writing. Realistically, this is difficult for special education. There is just not enough time and too many students. So I will continue to consider how I can create exemplars for my students while looking for alternatives.

The final concept is that writing is a shared process. This was not so much a new idea learned but reinforced. Students benefit by working with each other but they also benefit from other writers. I found so many ways to incorporate mentor texts, author talks, and ideas using technology for increasing shared writing that I am excited by the possibilities.

I learned so many things while creating my project. There are so many areas that I want to look into more deeply especially for the high school level. While there were many opportunities for new learning, there were also some limitations.

Limitations and Challenges

The biggest limitation for me is that fact that I no longer teach at the elementary level. I now teach at the highschool level. The obvious difficulty was not directly working with the type of students for whom I was writing. The second challenge was that with a new job always comes with new things to learn but the change put me in a new building, new structure, and new level of students. The amount of differences are amazing. While doing the research for my project, I looked for ways to modify and incorporate materials that would be appropriate for older students. I will be able to utilize many of the ideas that I have learned and will continue researching ways in which my current students will benefit.

The second struggle that I faced was finding and expert reviewer who has strengths in the area of teaching writing to elementary students with learning disabilities. There aren't many people locally that have strengths in this area while those who do are so overbooked with other commitments that they were not available. I was lucky to have some reviewing completed by teachers with elementary experience as well as special education.

Implications and Future Research

It has been difficult to create a curriculum for students I no longer teach; however, I have been able to remember the needs. The elementary students for whom the curriculum is written, go to a school that is a feeder school of the high school where I teach now. Many of the students that I work with now went to the elementary school and are still in special education. My experience at the high school reinforces my belief that

the teaching of written language in elementary special education needs to be more deliberate and driven by the need for students with learning disabilities to eventually transition to the mainstream classroom.

I plan to incorporate the teaching of self-regulation and many of the resources I discovered within my current teaching while continuing to increase my level of understanding and resources are that more specifically beneficial to my current students. Secondly, I would like to talk to some of my colleagues who teach elementary school students with learning disabilities and share some of the things that I learned as well as the curriculum to see if they would be interested in implementing some or part of it. A former professor of mine, in the Special Education Department at St. Cloud University, has shown interest in the SRSD model. She invited me share an overview of the model for a class for teacher candidates working toward their license in a special education area.

Communicating the Results and Benefits to the Profession

I have already starting sharing SRSD briefly with some of my colleagues at the highschool level and they are interested in learning more. Our district offers opportunities for teachers to present professional development to their colleagues and I hope to take this opportunity within the year. I also plan to begin incorporating SRSD into my current teaching.

A divide between philosophies, teaching strategies and responsibilities for students who struggle has been long standing between regular education and special education teachers. By using the SRSD with all students, it helps bridge the divide and reduces the 'their students

Summary

I began my journey many years ago in a cohort in St. Michael/Albertville with a different research question in a different teaching role. After losing my work, losing my motivation soon followed and lasted nearly ten years. As I stated in chapter 1, writing has always been difficult for me. I still struggle with putting my fingers to the keys as I put the finishing touches on almost a decade worth of starts and stops. I have accumulated a tremendous amount knowledge and ideas for future research. The path may have been long and bumpy but that makes reaching my destination so much more rewarding.

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