



# **Teaching Writing Skills to Students With HFAU and Asperger's Syndrome**

## ***Addressing Problematic Writing Skills and Long Term Affects***

Alice Murphy, EdD

Cynde Snider, PhD, NBCT

Georgia Department of Education

Division for Special Education Services and Supports

Leadership Meeting Spring 2011

# Written Expression Skills

- More students with ASD are being served in the general education setting.
- Georgia has approximately 61% of SWD spending 80% or > instructional time in the general education classroom.
- Likely that the LRE for AS and HFAU is the general education classroom

# Written Expression Skills

- Emphasis in education is on differentiation though with the complexity of serving AS and HFAU students, differentiation presents a challenge due to diversity on a case by case basis.
- Common problematic issues develop as more students are identified in the higher functioning range.

# Experience Is The Best Teacher

- Patterns of difficulty and deficits are noted through research and experience of special and general educators serving this population.
- Experience has taught educators that the approach to developing written expression skills incidentally is not a successful approach for students with ASD.

# Assessments

- Writing has high stakes in regard to state and national assessments.
- 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades must pass writing proficiency test

# Focus on Assessment

- State and national assessments provide evaluation of academic milestones.
- Building written expression skills is on-going.
- Looking at the “Big Picture”
- Goal setting
- Breaking down steps to accomplish goals

# Written Expression

- Significant difficulty exists for many students, particularly those with HFAU and Asperger's Syndrome
- Limited research is available on how AS characteristics affect academics, especially, written expression.

# Written Expression Difficulties

- Planning
- Organizing thoughts and transferring them to paper
- Seeking and accepting assistance
- Inflexible thinking patterns
- Sensory offensiveness



# Written Expression Difficulties

- Attention Deficit
- OCD Issues (topics of interest)
- Rigid and habitual behavior (topics of interest)
- Avoidance behavior
- Frustration and tolerance

# Written Expression Difficulties

- Literal thinking and may lack imaginative ideation, difficulty imagining possible future events and scenarios (Winter, 2003)
- Literal, current-thinking may directly impact ability to plan and write imaginative story.

# Motor Deficits

- Fine motor deficits are often associated with ASD leading to graphomotor deficits. Motor coordination slows the mechanics of writing. When paired with processing deficits and fine motor deficits or delays, ASD students fall further behind their peers in developing written expression skills.

# Motor Delays or Deficits

- Referral to an OT may be necessary.
- Fine motor skills development and monitoring recommended
- AT should be considered on an individual basis.

# Technology

- Age of technology is working in favor of HFAU and AS students.
- Keyboarding is essential to master as early as possible.
- Automaticity using word processor and other tools is essential to meet long term goals.
- Acquiring technology skills is key to reduction of frustration in area of written expression.

# Technology As Necessary Tool

- As “finger reach” develops, keyboarding mastery is recommended.
- Avoid developing habits such as “hunt and peck” and using the computer as toy.
- Daily computer use specified in lesson plans is necessary as an expectation.

# Strategies and Instruction

- Understand the profile of the individual learner.
- Early identification and intervention support the greatest opportunity for achieving long term goals.

# Strategy and Instruction

- Instruction designed to support strategic planning and organizing may improve their writing ability.
- Direct instruction in written expression
- Complete writing responses taught across the curriculum
- Writing as repetitive process



# Strategy and Instruction

- Abstract, imaginative and literal guided writing
- Guidance through breaking down a writing task
- Follow up required with each step of a task

# Strategy and Instruction

- Rules and mechanics of writing
- Organization, form and features of writing
- Purpose and goal of writing
- Audience and other perspectives
- Evaluation of communication between author and reader

# Self-Regulated Strategy Development

- Develop strategies for all stages of the writing process to include: planning, writing, revising, editing, and monitoring (Harris, Schjmidt, & Graham, 1998)
- Model written language
- Scaffold instruction and facilitate students gradually learning to select and implement strategies independently (Delano, 2007).

# Big Picture of Written Expression

- High stakes as milestones for grade progression
- High stakes for accomplishing life goals
- Getting to the big picture successfully

# Writing, NOT HANDWRITING!



Take the pencil out of the process:

- Make use of manipulatives
- Allow word processors
- Consider voice to written text

# Preteach Vocabulary

- Start with the concrete
  - Match words with pictures
  - Model actions
- Organize vocabulary into synonym groups
  - Fast, quick, speedy, rapid, swift, brisk, sudden

# Begin with Structured Writing

1. First, work out sentence(s) aloud with the student.
2. Next, write out sentence(s) for the student.
3. Finally, have student copy sentence(s) [*using a word processor*].

# Scaffold the Writing Tasks

- Framed paragraphs
- Models
- Formula writing
- Graphic organizers
- Picture writing





# Focus on Interests



Let me tell you  
about Sam.

# WRITE, not right

- ALWAYS separate drafting and revising from editing.
- Use the multiple draft approach.

# Teach Writing “Tricks”

- How to beat the writing test
- Analyzing prompts
- Planning ahead

# Don't Give Up or Give In

- Be persistent (firm but gentle)
- Begin with what's doable
- Develop writing routines

# Questions



Dr. John D. Barge, State School Superintendent

# GaDOE DSESS Contacts

Alice Murphy, EdD

Autism and Program Specialist

[mmurphy@doe.k12.ga.us](mailto:mmurphy@doe.k12.ga.us)

404-657-9957

Cynde Snider, PhD, NBCT

Professional Learning and Program Specialist

[csnider@doe.k12.ga.us](mailto:csnider@doe.k12.ga.us)

404-657-9971

Georgia Department of Education

[www.gadoe.org](http://www.gadoe.org)

Dr. John D. Barge, State School Superintendent