Teachers' Corner

Strategies for Teaching Writing to Students with Extensive Support Needs

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Writing instruction can be difficult to teach since students with Extensive Support Needs often have speech language impairments as well. Getting students to generate ideas and sentences when they lack vocabulary or have impeding behaviors can be overwhelming. However, writing instruction is important and gives students an additional way to communicate their thoughts, opinions, feelings, and memories.

In planning effective writing instruction, teachers must differentiate between writing and handwriting. Writing is the communication of ideas while handwriting is the act of producing symbols on paper. If a student has fine motor deficits, this does not mean that they cannot engage in writing. Writing is simply using symbols to communicate; think hieroglyphics, emojis, and picture symbols even. Writing can be fun in the classroom since there are many ways to do it, while at the same time learning more about your students. Included are two strategies you can use in the classroom tomorrow to get students writing.

Cloze

Cloze procedures give students a sentence stem or a blank for the student to generate a response. It allows the student to take part in writing something more complex than they may independently generate (Bellon-Harn et al, 2004). Cloze can reduce the amount a student must generate in order to prioritize their contribution to the creation of a text. It also allows an instructional group to share a prompt and compare how different students complete a sentence. Cloze writing can be efficient to use in class and pairs well with other strategies such as predictable writing charts and the expanding expression toolkit (Hall & Williams, 2001).

In my unit on bears, students rewrote Brown Bear, Brown Bear by Martin & Carle (1984). I gave students two blanks to identify a color and corresponding animal of their choice, with response boards prepared in advance. For example, "I see a pink flamingo looking at me" (Figure 1).
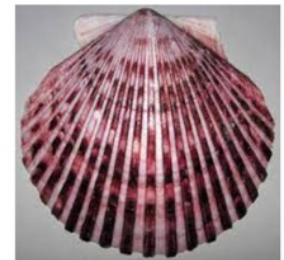

Figure 1

Example Student Product with Cloze Strategy

Purple clam, purple clam, what do you see?

I see a <u>pink</u> <u>flamingo</u> looking at me.

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In our August unit on schools, we wrote simple sentences such as "I use (school item).". Students can fill in with any number of answers, even ones not on my response board. This process connects easily with the steps in predictable writing charts, which have students not just complete a cloze sentence but do more with it, like "be the sentence" where each student takes an index card or post it note and physically arranges the words/people to organize the sentence or making a book with their sentences over the year and creating their own illustrations for what they draft (Erickson & Koppenhaver, 2020).

Even students with more complex needs can participate in the cloze strategy by using tactiles to represent ideas they want included in the text. For one student with a profound intellectual disability, I used sensorial stems for him to write a paragraph about fall. For example, we presented leaves crunching and a football, let him interact with both items, then placed one at each of his response points (head and left arm). When he made a choice, we added that item to the story. Figure 2 shows his final product scribed by the paraprofessional.

The cloze strategy gives students a chance to meaningful-

President's Message

Leah Wood

With a new year comes a new presidential cycle and my transition to the role of past president. It has been an honor to serve as president of the Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities. While I was lucky to help facilitate some of the work that was done this year, the accomplishments are the collective work of our dynamic committees. It's been exciting to experience the division grow and evolve in important ways. The actions of the committees and members of the board are aligning in a way that feels transformative. As a board, we have begun a critical conversation about our values and vision, and while there's much more work todo, what's clear to me is that we are finding our footing and voice.

In reflecting on the past year, a few observations stand out:

• We can have hard conversations. We can learn from each other. We are a space for many different people with different ideologies and that is ok. As long as we're working towards the same goal of improving quality of life for individuals with autism and developmental disabilities, we will continue to learn and grow together.

• We need more paths to leadership, and we need to diversify our leadership team. These are areas of continued growth, but the board knows this and has demonstrated a commitment to achieving these goals. Please reach out to a board member if you want to know more about how to become more involved. We are committed to creating equitable opportunities and pathways for involvement.

• This work matters. The work you all do matters. The size of our conferences has nearly tripled these past two years. This is a clear outcry to learn, share, and convene. We will continue to evolve to meet this increasing demand to come together in this important way.

Please join me in warmly welcoming Liz Harkins as our new president of DADD. I'm excited for Liz and excited for our division. Thank you all for your continued involvement in DADD.

Executive Director's Corner

Emily Bouck

As I write what may be my last newsletter as DADD Executive Director, I want to start by thanking not only the DADD boards who originally appointed me and then kept me on over these last few years, but also the membership who originally elected me back in 2007 and started my DADD journey. I have so enjoyed my years of DADD involvement. And while my time as Executive Director is coming to an end, I am excited to stay on as ETADD Co-Editor. I know the DADD board has a committee that is actively seeking for a new DADD Executive Director, who will continue to support the DADD Boards as well as members. I will continue to stay on in this role until a new Executive Director is named as well as mentor that individual throughout the next year. I am, and will always be, committed to DADD.

Second, I thought I would take this opportunity to discuss a video that I show in my Special Education Law class that I teach to undergraduates. I am not sure how many have watched Now This News (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MQafuiLGP7g) that focuses on Commemorating 30 Years of the Americans with Disabilities Act. I really like showing this video to my undergraduates as it makes them aware of the role of disability rights within the civil rights fight as well as exposes them to some history that many are not aware of. For example, if you have never watched the video, it makes viewers aware of the longest occupation of a federal building occurred in 1977 in relation to protest relation to the lack of enforcement/regulations from Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. It shows historical video throughout the years, highlighting the role of disability rights within civil rights – including Section 504 and then even more recently the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990 (and the crawls up the Capitol steps to make a statement to lawmakers). If you have not watched the video, I strongly encourage you to do so—and to shows others.

Misperceptions and Facts About Specially Designed Instruction

Jessica Bowman   **Gail Ghere**

University of Minnesota TIES Center

Meeting the needs of students with autism and developmental disabilities in schools can be a complex task. Special education teachers, general education teachers, related service providers, and paraprofessionals may each play a part in providing special education services to ensure that a student is supported to learn and make progress in the general education curriculum. Current school practices and procedures combined with misperceptions that are intentionally or unintentionally propagated can impact the way educators view and interpret what the law says about the provision of special education services.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines special education as "specially designed instruction (SDI), at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability." The core of special education is SDI. So how does IDEA define SDI? According to IDEA Section 1401,

"(3) Specially designed instruction means adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child under this part, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction—
> *(i) To address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability; and*
> *(ii) To ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children."*

Educators should be equipped with strategies on how to adapt the content, methodology, and delivery of instruction in a way that meets the needs of students with disabilities and ensures that they can meet general education curriculum standards.

Importance of SDI

Providing high quality SDI to students with autism and developmental disabilities (and students with disabilities in general) is essential to ensuring that their needs are met and that they have access to the general education curriculum (Sabia et al., 2020). For students with autism and developmental disabilities, SDI can include many instructional strategies, such as simplifying content, the provision of systematic instruction and prompting, and the use of visual aids in instruction.

Equally important as the strategies that could be incorporated into SDI, however, is clarity on how SDI fits into the larger context of the school: Who can implement SDI? Where can it be implemented? How does it relate to other instructional frameworks like multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) or universal design for learning (UDL)? Ambiguity on the answers to these questions can lead to very real misperceptions that translate into rigid and potentially harmful implementation of SDI by education staff at the state, district, and school level.

Misperceptions and Facts

Misperception: Because it is a special education mandate, SDI cannot be delivered in a general education classroom.

Fact: IDEA does not mandate where SDI is delivered.

The goal of IDEA is to support students in inclusive settings whenever possible. This means that SDI can be delivered anywhere as long as it aligns with the students' Individualized Education Program (IEP) and their least restrictive environment (PROGRESS Center, 2020). If SDI could only be delivered in special education classrooms, then SDI would be antithetical to the intent of the law and the least restrictive environment.

Students' Corner

Introducing Thai Ray Williams: The Next DADD Student Representative

Deidre Gilley
Doctoral Student
Florida State University

Thai Ray Wiliams
Doctoral Student
University of North Carolina Charlotte

I, Deidre Gilley, first and foremost want to thank DADD for the honor and opportunity to serve the board for the last two years as the DADD Student Representative. This position has allowed me to work with a range of distinguished professionals and students of all levels. The memories I have created with DADD will stay with me forever. I look forward to my involvement in DADD moving beyond this position as I serve the organization in other capacities.

Secondly, I want to introduce the next up and coming DADD Student Representative, Thai Ray Williams. It is my distinguished honor to introduce her to the rest of DADD's membership body. I have had the opportunity to work with Thai in a range of capacities related to DADD including when she won the DADD Teacher Feature in 2022, within several DADD Committees (i.e., Diversity Committee), and various DADD initiatives! I conducted an informal interview with Thai for us to get to know her a little bit better! Please find our interview below:

1. Deidre: "Tell the readers a little bit about 'Thai Ray Williams'. Where she comes from, who she is, and where she is now."

Thai: "My childhood was spent in both North and South Carolina. I graduated from Lancaster High School in South Carolina, where I served as a peer mentor in a self-contained classroom for students with intellectual disability. This sparked my love of working with individuals with disabilities and led me to the College of Charleston, where I received a bachelor's degree in special education with a focus on intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, and early childhood education. I taught across disability categories and educational settings for 32 years with the majority of my time spent with individuals with intellectual disability, autism, and

multiple disabilities. I graduate from East Tennessee State University in 2022 with a Master's degree in Advanced Studies in Special Education. I'm currently a second-year doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and the parent of a teenage son who is twice exceptional."

2. Deidre: "Thank you, Thai! Wow, 32 years of experience within the classroom. That is amazing! Next can you tell us a few "fun facts" about who Thai Ray Williams is? What does she like to do, what are her interest, and what are her hobbies?"

Thai: "One of the most surprising facts about me is that I currently live in a tiny house. Prior to applying to the doctoral program, I dreamed of traveling around the country living what is frequently referred to as "vanlife". I was attracted to the simplicity, mobility, and adventure vanlife offered, so I bought a van, my partner and I converted it, and the journey began. Once I was accepted in the doctoral program and trying to make it on a grant stipend, living vanlife also allowed me to keep the 103-year old craftsman home I own and am currently remodeling in Montana and to travel 8,000 miles to 17 states this past summer. Additionally, I am a multimedia artist and lover of nature."

3. Deidre: "Wow! You traveled 8,000 miles this summer to 17 different states? That sounds like an adventure! Can you tell us a little bit about why you choose to have a career in special education?"

Thai: "I'm pretty sure I was a teacher from the time I was born. I have vivid memories of teaching my dolls as a child, imitating my teachers to a T. Some kids played house; I played school. I was also the student who asked teachers for all of the extra worksheets because Thai's schoolhouse was perpetually low on resources. As a teenager, I joined a high school club, Civinettes, whose philanthropic organization was ARC, and chose to spend one period a day as a peer mentor in a self-contained classroom. That was it; I was hooked. Special education allowed me to combine teaching and working with individuals with disabilities in a career I loved. It was the best career choice I could have ever made!"

4. Deidre: "That is fantastic. I played school too! I can really redesignate with the feeling that you always felt like a teacher. Now, can you tell us about your research interests?"

Thai: "While my primary research interest will always be curriculum and instruction for students with extensive support needs (ESN), the further I get into my doctoral

ly engage in writing, while structuring it errorlessly gives them a finished product they can use and practice with as a model of correct sentence structure.

Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers are an evidence-based practice for or-

Figure 2

Student Example of Writing with Tactile Stimuli

In fall, I like to <u>walk</u> (head switch-shoe for 'walk' hand switch-blanket for 'sleep'). I play in the <u>leaves</u> (head switch-football, hand switch-leaves). I smell <u>grandma cooking</u> (head switch-grandma's voice for 'grandma cooking' hand switch-applesauce). It is <u>getting colder outside</u> (head switch-warmed toy for 'warm by the fire' handswitch ice pack for 'getting colder'). I see <u>pumpkins and falling leaves</u> (headswitch-pumpkin, handswitch-leaves) in autumn.

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ganizing ideas and are effective across subject areas (Ault & Courtade, 2022). Many skills are embedded in the use of a graphic organizer such as the ability to summarize, categorize, and sequence.

One example of a graphic organizer is the four square. This easy to reproduce graphic organizer is just as it sounds, four squares. The Four Square Writing Method (FSWM) has been effective across grade levels and across content areas (Gould & Gould, 1999). The four squares are used to organize the writing, with the topic placed in the middle and details in the surrounding boxes. One way to use the FSWM is as a Frayer Model to learn vocabulary. A Frayer Model is a graphic organizer that supports learning and describing vocabulary words by examining definitions, characteristics, and example versus non examples (Frayer et al., 1969) (Figure 3). Another way to use the FSWM is to plan a narrative text. In the center, list the topic along with details to include in an introduction, label the surrounding squares as "first," "next," "then," and "conclusion." Within each section students can list details and then expand them to sentences and paragraphs. For even the most complex needs, a four square can be used to identify or match items that are included in a category. For example, a laminated file folder with "insects" in the middle and students can sort pictures into the four squares, this can be done errorlessly or to assess a student's ability to catego-

rize (Figure 4).

Graphic organizers can also be virtual. Evmenova et al. (2020) have developed a web based graphic organizer with many supports embedded, including a way to auto-compile a student's writing within the organizer. Within Project WEGO's graphic organizer, students pick their own goals, self-check frequently, and type out their responses all in one place (Evmenova et al., 2018). The technology based graphic organizer (TBGO) they have developed, free for anyone to sign up and use, is focused on opinion writing and can include multiple prompts for student choice. One example of using the TBGO is from a middle school where we used an anchor text about December, seasonal darkness, and holiday lights. We asked students if they preferred the dark or the light and why. I did create additional response options for students as well as made a task analysis for the steps; but with these supports and the ones embedded in the TBGO, students picked an essay and personal writing goal for what they wanted to self-check within their writing, identified their opinion, reasons why they picked that, and one to three explanations for that reason. The TBGO gives students an easy-to-follow visual representation with built in support to produce a complete writing piece. The most current version of the web based graphic organizer is at https://wego.gmu.edu/wego/graphorghtml/graphorg_p.php (Evmenova et al., 2018).

Figure 3

Student Example of Scribed Four Square Product
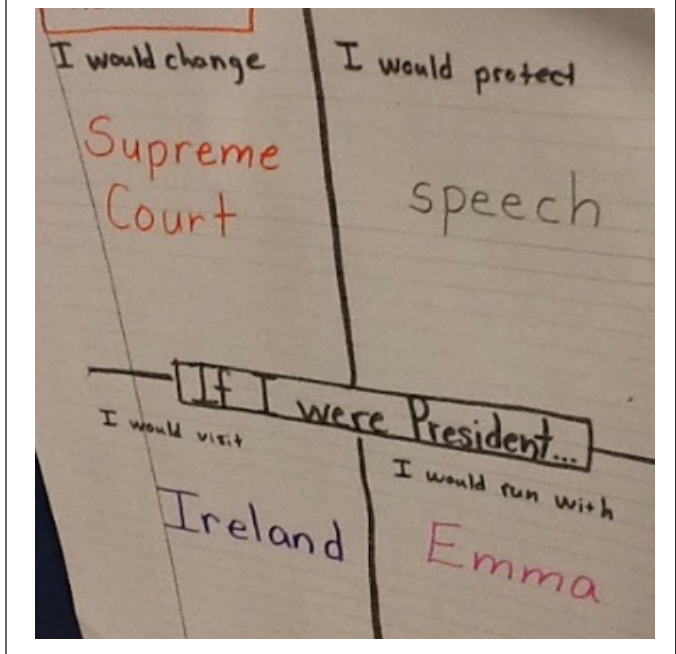
Conclusion

Giving students access to academic curriculum is certainly an important priority and access to writ-

ing instruction can and should be included with and embedded into that instruction. Making writing engaging and streamlined for students with extensive support needs is important in expanding their communication options. Try out these diverse ways to get students writing in your class today!

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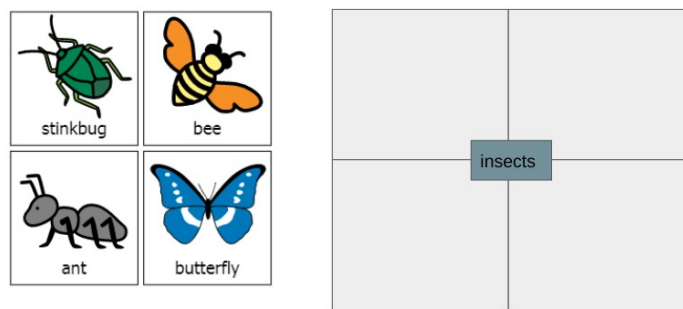
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Figure 4
Example of Errorless Four Square

program and the more I learn and experience, my research interests have expanded. I welcome the opportunity to assist in addressing the lack of Native American representation in research, particularly investigations on lived experiences with special education services and culturally-sustaining and culturally-revitalizing practices. Given the current special education teacher shortage and attrition rates, I've also gained a new interest in ways to support special education teachers with alternative certification."

5. Deidre: "What interesting areas of research! I look forward to what will come out from your future findings. Now, last but not least, why did you apply to be the new Student Representative of DADD?"

Thai: "I applied to be the new Student Representative of DADD for several reasons. First, students have a voice in DADD, and, based on my past experience as a representative, I felt I had the skills needed to effectively represent our student members. Second, I witnessed the impact Deidre had on our student population during her tenure as student representative. She provided resources, established accountability groups, ensured our needs were addressed, and, more importantly, built a community of students who, although they were separated by many miles, felt like a supportive family. As student representative, I knew I would have the ability to ensure we continue to build on this foundation. Third, seeking to become a faculty member post-graduation, serving as DADD student representative gives me the opportunity to begin my journey of professional service under the guidance of the DADD board, which in and of itself is an amazing opportunity. As student representative, my goal is to serve DADD and its student members with a focus on improving the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities."

Thank you, Thai for your time to share with us at DADD more about you! I am so excited to see what you have in store for us at DADD. You are going to do a fantastic job! GOOD LUCK! You can reach out to either myself, Deidre Gilley, at dgp17c@fsu.edu or Thai Ray Williams at rtray@charlotte.edu. Thai will officially begin her term on Tuesday, January 2nd 2024 and will remain in this position through December 2025.

Misperception: SDI must be delivered by a special education teacher because they are the one trained in educating students with disabilities.

Fact: SDI should be planned by a special education teacher but, in many cases, can be delivered by any school staff.

General education and speical education teachers often work collaboratively to plan and implement SDI. In an inclusive classroom, general education teachers may provide SDI alongside their standard instruction, with support from special education teachers and other professionals (Sabia & Thurlow, 2022; Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction et al., 2021). This collaborative approach allows for the sharing of expertise and resources, allowing students with disabilities to be supported effectively throughout their day by multiple educators.

Misperception: SDI is not the same as universal design for learning (UDL) or differentiated instruction.

Fact: SDI, UDL, and diiferentiated instruction are all used to increase access to learning (IRIS Center & TIES Center, 2022).

Sometimes, UDL and differentiated instruction may include strategies that might be related to a student's needed SDI. Teachers are encouraged to differentiate or universally design their instruction to meet the diverse needs of all students. SDI is essentially a form of differentiation. In classrooms where UDL is used, students with disabilities may require fewer individualized supports because planning for a wide variety of learners is built into instruction for all learners. Teachers should be skilled in adapting their teaching methods to address the unique needs of each student.

Misperception: In a multitiered system of support, SDI would be considered tier 3, because that is special education.

Fact: In MTSS, SDI should be delivered, as needed, in any tier of instruction that the student with disability receives (Thurlow et al., 2020).

All students should receive Tier 1 instruction, where students with disabilities will likely require SDI to ensure that their instruction is accessible and effective.

Conclusion

Education teams require knowledge and skill in the strategies needed to implement SDI and meet the needs of students with disabilities. However, they also require knowledge in how SDI fits into the larger school context to enable their SDI to be effective in meeting the students' needs so they can make progress in the general education curriculum. District and school leaders may need to analyze and address potential misperceptions to ensure that students with disabilities are provided high quality special education services in their least restrictive environment.

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Editor's Note

Chris Denning

I hope you enjoyed this issue of DADD Express. We'll continue to present content in Express that supports individuals with ASD, ID, and DD, and diversity, equity and inclusion. Please reach out if you have ideas for content or would like to write for us.

Let me know if you'd like copies of recent Teacher's Corner or Legal Brief and EBP articles or look for them on our website.

Interested in writing for DADD Express? We are always soliciting articles for: Teachers' Corner, and our EBP and Legal Briefs sections. If you would like to contribute, please contact me with ideas or questions (christopher.denning@umb.edu).

DADD Website

www.daddcec.com

Pathways to Engaging in Your DADD Community

1 Visit your DADD community website
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Visit our site to gain access to tons of information and resources.

2 Check out our journals

Find up to date issues of *Education and training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities (ETDADD)* and our *DADD Online Journal* on the community website.

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5 Recognize your outstanding colleagues

Nominate colleagues, students, legislators, and others for one of our annual awards!

6 Tap into your resources

Explore the online learning supports portal, read the DADD Express, or check out past Teacher's Corner or Policy Briefs.

7 Invite a friend

Share your love for DADD with a friend and encourage them to join our community too!

Get Plugged In!

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

Oversee all communication between the division and the public, including the web site, social media, and division newsletter.

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MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

Develop and implement measures to increase, maintain, and support DADD members.

Melissa Savage- melissa.savage@unt.edu

AWARDS COMMITTEE

Maintain and conduct a process for solicitation and review of Division-authorized awards.

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Oversee all print, electronic, and video publications of a scholarly nature, including the division journal, ETADD, and books, monographs, and other media

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To advocate for the rights and safety for (a) individuals with autism, intellectual disability and / or developmental disabilities and (b) the professionals who work with them.

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