Writing Knowledge in Second Grade Students with Asperger Syndrome:

Teacher and Student Perceptions

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Research Questions

This study is a replication and extension of the longitudinal work that was done by Kim and Lorsbach (2005) with children from Kindergarten through the end of first grade. The purpose of this study is to explore whether young children with Asperger Syndrome (AS) can describe their writing self-efficacy and how teachers’ perceptions are related to the students’ own perception of their writing self-efficacy. “Writing self-efficacy beliefs are defined as an individual students’ judgment or competence in writing” (Kim & Lorsbach, 2005). Little is known about the self-efficacy of students with AS in relation to their writing, so this study is intended to provide insight into this area by studying second grade students with AS. Individual students, their classroom teachers and paraeducators will be asked to participate in this study. Perceptions of student’s writing self-efficacy will be investigated by asking the following research questions:

1. How do second grade students with AS describe their writing knowledge?
2. How do special education teachers describe their expectations of second grade student’s writing knowledge?
3. How do second grade general education teachers describe their expectations of second grade general education student’s writing knowledge?
4. How do para-educators describe their expectations of second grade student’s writing knowledge?

Method

Design

A qualitative study about writing knowledge will be conducted using a homogeneous sampling of second grade students with AS. The use of homogeneous sampling will facilitate in the understanding of the writing knowledge of individuals with AS. This will then provide researchers valuable information to use when conducting future intervention research. Both
qualitative and quantitative knowledge is needed regarding individuals with AS in order to develop research based intervention strategies to facilitate academic achievement of these students.

Participants

Teachers. A total of four teachers will be contacted to participate in this study. Two general education second grade teachers one from each of the two schools will be selected to participate in the study. Two special education teachers one from each site, who work with second grade students with AS will be contacted about participating in the study. Demographic information will be collected about each teacher as well as information about their years of teaching experience, educational background and experience working with special needs populations.

Para-educators. The para-educators from each second grade special education classroom will be selected to participate in the study, for a total of two para-educators. Demographic information will be collected about each para-educator as well as information about their experience level, educational background and their knowledge of special needs populations.

Students. Five-second grade students from each of the two specialized Asperger programs, total of ten students, will be chosen to participate in this study. Demographic information about each student will be collected as well as relevant information from their school records such as additional medical conditions and IQ scores.

Setting

The study will take place during the spring semester in two suburban elementary school second grade classrooms. The two schools are part of a large school district on the East Coast of the United States. In order to conduct a homogeneous sampling, the students all have a diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome and attend schools that have specialized programs to specifically address the learning needs of students with AS. The demographics of the students will be
representational of the school district. The racial demographics for the district are: 22.9% African American, 0.3% American Indian, 15.2% Asian American, 21.5% Hispanic and 40.1% white. A total of 25.8% of the students in the district receive free or reduced meals. Within the district 12% of the students are speakers of other languages, 12.1% receive special education services and there are more than 164 countries represented speaking 134 languages.

Researcher Background

I enter this project as a graduate student, working on a PhD in Special Education at George Mason University. I am entering my fourteenth year working as a Speech Language Pathologist running my own private practice as well as working in the school system. During this time I have worked in an elementary school with children from two years old to sixth grade, and as an early childhood special education teacher in a home resource program. I have extensive experience testing students on a variety of measures as well as conducting observations of students in classrooms during instructional activities. My experience conducting research is emerging. I have some prior experience working on a research project teaching middle school students how to write persuasive essays. Asperger Syndrome is a research interest of mine and during my studies I have read intervention articles and written papers on this population of individuals. It is my desire to add to our knowledge about children with AS and to find ways to help teachers address the academic needs of these students.

Data Sources

Data for this study will be obtained from a variety of sources including interviews, observations, and artifacts. Specific measures will be adapted from the ones used by Kim & Lorsbach (2005). Adaptations will be reviewed by second grade general education teachers and special education teachers who have experience working with students with AS. A pilot test will be conducted using these measures and revisions will be made if necessary prior to using these measures in the study. A semi-structured interview will be conducted with each student.
Writing Knowledge

individual. The interview will consist of ten questions and will address student’s knowledge of writing. Questions on the writing interview will include items like “What is writing?” and “What makes you a good writer?” Probes will be used if needed in to elicit more information, clarify points or have the interviewee expand on their idea (Creswell, 2008, p. 229).

Classroom observations will occur in the special education classrooms during writing instruction. Initially the observations will be non-participatory and then the researcher will move into a participant observer role. Observations will specifically focus on behaviors of students as they approached writing tasks, such as how much time they take for writing, their enthusiasm or interest in the task, comments they make while participating in the writing tasks as well as observing how well they stay on task during the writing activity will all be recorded. During participatory observations the researcher will be able to talk with the student and record the amount of time each student spent planning their writing. The researcher will collect weekly samples of each student’s work as artifacts.

Interviews with the teachers will be conducted individually. The researcher will use semi-structured, open-ended questions during the interview. A series of twenty questions will be asked of each teacher. Questions will consists of…Probes will be used in all interviews if needed in order or the researcher to elicit more information, clarify points or have the interviewee expand on their idea (Creswell, 2008, p. 229). The researcher will collect weekly lesson plans from the teachers as artifacts for the study.

Procedures

Permission to conduct the research was obtained from George Mason University Human Subjects Review Board as well as the school district Human Subjects Review Board. Permission was also obtained from the school principals, classroom teachers, parents and students. The researcher will serve as the primary observer in the classrooms and interviewer for all of the
individuals participating in the study. A second researcher will consult on thirty percent of the observations and on the coding of the interviews in order to improve the quality of the study.

The researcher will contact the teachers, para-educators and parents about the study. Teachers, para-educators and parents will be given two consent forms to fill out. One form will be for their records and the second from will need to be returned for the researcher’s record. Once all consent forms have been received, a meeting for the parents and students will be held in order to obtain assent from the second grade students with AS who will be interviewed during the study. Two assent forms will be signed, one for the families’ records and one for the researcher to maintain. The researcher will be available during the meeting to go over the assent forms and address any questions about the research.

The research will take place at the two elementary schools during the spring semester. Interviews will be conducted individually with the teachers and para-educators initially prior to observations beginning. These interviews will be scheduled for one and one-half hours at the educator’s work site. All interviews will be audio taped in order to accurately capture the interviewee’s statements. Audio taping the interviews will help the researcher respond and continue the dialogue with the interviewee in a natural manner because the researcher will not have to take notes while trying to keep the conversation going. Audio taping will also ensure that all of the interviewee’s points are accurately transcribed. All transcribed interviews will be reviewed with the educators in order to verify that the transcribed statements are accurate. Once all the teacher interviews are completed, non-participatory observations will occur in the two classrooms. The researcher will conduct observations during writing activities three times a week for a one hour over three weeks. Initially observations will be non participatory on the part of the observer, however once the researcher has had a chance to gain a broad perspective of the classroom, she will slowly become involved with the students during the writing activities as a participant observer. Switching roles from a nonparticipant observer to a participant observer
will provide the researcher the opportunity to interact with the students and observe their work first hand. Creswell (2008) stated that participating in both roles permits the researcher the opportunity to be subjectively involved initially and then progress into a more objective role. The participatory observations will also occur for a three-week time period three days a week for one hour. After the researcher has spent some time in the classroom observing and interacting with the students, interviews will be conducted with the ten students individually. The interviews with the students will be conducted over a two-week period and one hour will be allotted for each interview.

Proposed Data Analyses

After every interview, data will be transcribed and typed into a word document. A computer program such as NVivo will be used in order analyze and sort the transcribed data. A list of five to seven themes or categories that have common characteristics will then be identified from the transcribed data. Answering the research questions and forming in-depth understandings of the observable facts will enable the researcher to develop themes. The themes will enable to researcher to organize and analyze the data. In order to add rigor and insight into the study the themes will be layered or interconnected based on the themes that develop.
References

