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Teaching Writing for Students with Learning Disabilities in an Inclusive Classroom Setting: A Curriculum Development Project

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Teaching Writing for Students with Learning Disabilities in an Inclusive Classroom Setting:
A Curriculum Development Project

A Senior Honors Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for Graduation in the Honors College

By

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students a model example of an Honors senior thesis project.*

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Abstract

Students with learning disabilities often struggle with writing. They lack the appropriate strategies to use while writing, which leaves them frustrated and unwilling to continue writing. Teachers need to find strategies that will help their students become more engaged and excited about their writing. Finding effective strategies for planning, composing, and revising writing pieces will help students with learning disabilities become more proficient writers. Some strategies that can be used are graphic organizers, TREE, mentor texts, and CDO. These are different planning, composing, and revising strategies that can be taught to help the students become more effective with their writing. Being able to write proficiently is an important life skill that everyone needs to learn. Helping students with learning disabilities develop better writing skills will help them become more successful students and will lead them to a better future. In order for students with learning disabilities to become better writers, they need to be given appropriate strategies in planning, composing, and revising written pieces. This project provided information on students with learning disabilities, writing, and strategies that can be used to help these students become successful writers. Lesson plans and commentary aligned with the Educative Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) were incorporated to show how these strategies can be used.

Key Words: *Students with Learning Disabilities, writing, teaching strategies, Educative Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) lesson plan*

Chapter 1: Introduction

This purpose of this project was to provide information on students with learning disabilities, writing, and strategies that can be used to help these students become successful writers. This project is important because people need to know how to write effectively. Writing is a life skill that everyone needs to be proficient at. Students should learn about different styles of writing and should be able to successfully create pieces that take on different forms. Teaching these students strategies to help them get through the different stages of writing will be very beneficial. The strategies will allow the students to see the importance of the different stages of writing and will help them understand how to get through each part. It is crucial that teachers find ways for students to become more engaged with their writing, especially students with learning disabilities. These students struggle with writing and often lack the appropriate strategies to be successful writers. Teaching them strategies for each stage of writing will provide them with the opportunity to get through each part with ease. Although these strategies are guided towards students with learning disabilities, these strategies will be beneficial for any student to learn. These are strategies that can be used at any grade level and can be adapted to meet the needs of each grade level. This project is also important because it provided teacher candidates an example of what the edTPA requires. An example of a unit plan was provided along with the commentary, which are a part of the requirements of the edTPA. It also showed teacher candidates the importance of research. When planning lessons and activities to use in the classroom, it is crucial that there is evidence as to why you chose to what to do in the lesson. It is important to back up your ideas with research and you need to be able to explain why your lesson is going to be successful.

This curriculum project was designed to provide teachers with strategies that can be used to teach writing to students with learning disabilities. The strategies that were discussed within this project target the different parts of writing: planning, composing, and revising. These are important steps for students to learn and having a strategy for each stage will help students be successful in each stage and will make writing more meaningful.

In chapter 2, there was the review of literature. In this section, there was an overview discussing topics including writing, students with learning disabilities, writing with students with learning disabilities, useful instructional strategies, strategies for planning, composing, and revising, and the importance of helping our students with writing.

In chapter 3, the methodology was explained. This section provided insight into the process for lesson planning. There was a discussion of what format was to be used for the lesson plans. Also, there was a brief discussion of how to choose a strategy along with a quick explanation to what each lesson of the unit entails. This set up the unit plan that was discussed in chapter 4.

Chapter 4 was the unit plan. In this chapter, there were three lesson plans that made up the writing unit. The lesson plans followed the edTPA guidelines. Each lesson was a different stage of the writing process. Lesson 1 was for planning, lesson 2 was for composing, and lesson 3 was for revising.

In chapter 5, the rationale for the unit was explained. This was the edTPA planning commentary, which described reasoning for the choices that were made for the lessons within the unit. This chapter explained my decisions and showed the different questions that needed to be thought about when creating a unit plan.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, there was an overview discussing topics of writing, students with learning disabilities, writing with students with learning disabilities, useful instructional strategies, strategies for planning, composing, and revising, and the importance of helping our students with writing.

What is Writing?

Smith (1983) explains writing as a complex process involving many different rules that need to be followed. Spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, organization, formatting, and style all need to be done in the appropriate manner in order to clearly express ideas through writing. There are many different genres of writing that require different styles and conventions in order to portray their message appropriately. Students need to learn about the different structural elements of writing in order to become proficient writers. Writing is made up of many different categories, such as books, poems, plays, songs, jokes, cards, notes, recipes, catalogues, diaries, posters, announcements, cartoons, and many more. Writing takes all kinds of forms, which are all used for a similar purpose. They are there to communicate information and express ideas (Smith, 1983).

Anderson (2014) explains writing as a transaction. Writing is a form of communication between a writer and a reader. It is a way for writers to be heard and a way for them to connect to others. Written language provides individuals with an opportunity to express their thoughts and ideas in a meaningful way (Anderson, 2014). According to Mather, Wendling, and Roberts (2009), there are five main contributors to written expression. These five components would include handwriting, spelling, usage, vocabulary, and text structure. These five components work

hand in hand to help the writer express their thoughts and ideas. In order to write efficiently and effectively, the writer needs to have knowledge in all of these areas (Mather, et al., 2009).

Handwriting

Mather, et al. (2009) explains handwriting as a fine-motor skill that is used to help individuals communicate their ideas through written expression. It involves fine-motor skill coordination, letter memory, and letter formation. Handwriting quality and appearance varies from person to person and often controls how much a student may write. Those who have an easier time writing and have more legible writing tend to write more than those students who struggle to write legibly and quickly. Students who struggle with handwriting have difficulty coordinating their motor movements that they need to write the letters. In order to have good handwriting, students must have the ability to recall the letter forms and use the correct motor patterns to write them. They also must be able to appropriately judge the amount of space that is needed between the letters and the words and where they are being placed on the page. Handwriting must also be legible and fluent in order to be considered effective. Handwriting is an important component of writing (Mather, et al., 2009).

Spelling

According to Mather, et al. (2009), spelling is the most difficult part of the written language. When spelling, students have to correctly recall and write down the word. When a difficulty in spelling is combined with a difficulty in handwriting, students really struggle to communicate their ideas through writing. There are four components of spelling that contribute to our understanding and knowledge of words. These would include phonology, morphology, orthography, and semantics. Phonology deals with the sounds of language. Phonemes are the smallest units of sounds that are put together to create words. Morphology is dealing with the

smallest meaningful letter combinations and word structures. Morphemes are the smallest meaningful units of language. Orthography is the writing system of language, which involves word spellings, punctuation marks, and numbers. Orthography is made up of different graphemes, which are written letters and letter patterns. Semantics involves word choice and the vocabulary that a student may know. Spelling may be a challenging part of writing, but it is essential for clear and effective writing (Mather, et al., 2009).

Usage

As pointed out by Mather, et al. (2009), usage is dealing with the rules of the written language. Capitalization, punctuation, and syntax have a lot of control over the written language. They need to be used properly in order to produce an effective piece of writing. Students need to know these rules and need to be constantly using them in their writing in order for them to create a clear and reliable form of communication. Things such as capitalization and punctuation are only used in written communication, not through oral communication. Syntax, or grammar, is used in both written and oral communication. Students who struggle with usage are challenged by putting words in the correct order and following capitalization and punctuation rules. They also might struggle with using pronouns, subject-verb agreement, and consistent verb tense. Following the rules of written language helps the writer portray their thoughts and ideas in a more effective manner (Mather, et al., 2009).

Vocabulary

Mather, et al. (2009) states that word choice is a very important aspect of writing. Strong word choice helps the writer clearly portray their ideas and makes their writing more effective. Some students have issues with vocabulary in their written expression due to the fact that their oral language vocabulary may be stronger and more descriptive than their written language

vocabulary. Students who struggle with vocabulary often struggle with word retrieval, morphology, or don't have breadth and depth of word knowledge. Word retrieval deals with our ability to quickly and efficiently recall words. Students who struggle with this lack the ability to recall words quickly and often portray a delay in producing words, even common objects, letters, or numbers, omit and substitute words, and use circumlocutions. Students who are challenged by morphology struggle with understanding the meaning of root words, prefixes, and suffixes. Those who lack breadth and depth of word knowledge lack the understanding of word meanings and the various meanings that words may have. Having a strong word choice will help writers communicate to others more successfully (Mather, et al., 2009).

Text Structure

As Mather, et al. (2009) describes text structure as the way that texts are organized. All styles of text are organized in a certain way to help convey a certain message. There are particular formats and styles that are to be followed for different types of text. It is important for students to learn about the different genres and styles of writing in order to be able to express their thoughts and ideas in the most effective way. Students need to be able to create a clear and comprehensible piece of work that fits the guidelines for the style or genre of writing. There are two main styles of writing that students generally work with, which are narrative and expository. Narrative is story-like and is expressive of creativity. Expository is more informational and involves research. Students need to be knowledgeable about both forms of text structure (Mather, et al., (2009).

Students with Learning Disabilities

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a specific learning disability is

a disorder in one 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. Such term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. Such term does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of intellectual disability, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2014).

So, a learning disability is a disorder in a basic psychological process that causes implications in academic performance. Reid, Lienemann, and Hagaman (2013) point out the subtypes of a learning disability, which were originally explained by Fletcher, et al. (2002); Fletcher, Morris, and Lyon (2005); and Lyon, Fletcher, and Barnes (2003). There are six different subtypes of a learning disability that target the areas of issues students with a learning disability may be facing. These areas would include reading, writing, and math: word level reading, reading comprehension, reading fluency, math, reading and math, and written expression. These are the different areas where students with a learning disability may struggle with. Students who struggle with word level reading have problems with decoding the text accurately and fluently. Those who struggle with reading comprehension have trouble understanding language and may have problems with their working memory. Students who have trouble with reading fluently have a slow rate of reading and have problems processing information in a quick manner. Students who are challenged by math have trouble using problem solving strategies and have difficulty in understanding math facts. Those who are challenged by reading and math are faced with memory issues and can lack the connection between working memory and long-term memory. Students challenged by written expression generally have issues with spelling, handwriting, and creating text (Reid, et al., 2013).

Cortiella and Horowitz (2014) explain that reading is the most common difficulty that student with a learning disability face. But, the most common types of learning disabilities occur in the areas of reading, math, and writing. The most common specific learning disability in reading is dyslexia. This is a disability where the learner generally has difficulty with phonemic awareness, phonological processing, and word decoding. Individuals with dyslexia often struggle with noticing sounds in words, reading fluently, and often have trouble with spelling and vocabulary. Dyscalculia is the most common specific learning disability in math. This is a disability where the individual has difficulty with counting, math calculations, measurements, and problem-solving. The most common specific learning disability in writing is dysgraphia. This is a disability that accounts for both hand writing and written expression. Students with dysgraphia often struggle with pencil grip, forming letter shapes, formatting and grammar of written expression, and organizing written expression. (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014).

Causes of Learning Disabilities

Although there isn't a certain known cause of learning disabilities, there is a greater understanding of where the disability comes from now. Cortiella and Horowitz (2014) explain that it is known that there is a neurological difference to a structure of an area of the brain. This variance in brain structure affects an individual's ability to process information, whether it affects their ability to receive, store, process, retrieve, or communicate the information they are dealing with. One possible explanation for a learning disability is damage to the brain either before, during, or after birth in critical times of development. These could include maternal illnesses, injuries, or drug or alcohol use. It could also be a result of malnutrition, low birth weight, oxygen deprivation, traumatic experiences, or exposure to toxins, such as lead or tobacco (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014).

Reid, et al. (2013) claim that learning disability is such a broad category with a lot of variance, which makes it hard to determine a specific cause. There are different hypotheses that capture possibilities of a cause for learning disabilities. One of these hypothesis is from a medical perspective, which corresponds with Cortiella and Horowitz (2014). They argue that there it is a brain-based disorder that is a result of a neurological disorder. The other hypothesis is that it is more of a cognitive issue. It is argued that a learning disability is not a result of neurological damage, it is a result of a lack of psychological processes (Reid, et al., 2013). Mercer (1997) explained that parents didn't want to accept that their children were brain-damaged. They made the claim that it was a cognitive problem, not a neurological problem. These individuals struggle with assessments, using strategies, or have issues with short or long-term memory. Reid, et al. (2013) also points out that a learning disability may also be genetic or caused by chemical imbalances in neurotransmitters, such as dopamine or serotonin. There is not a known cause, but there is on-going research that is helping narrow down the causes and helping us understand more and more about learning disabilities and how they happen (Reid, et al., 2013).

Characteristics of Students with a Learning Disability

According to Reid, et al. (2013), students with learning disabilities make up 44.6% of the special education population. Cortiella and Horowitz (2014) explain that this is the largest category of disability, which is responsible for 2.4 million students in the American public school system. From 1976 to 2000, the category of learning disabilities was the fastest growing category in special education, with over a three hundred percent increase in twenty-four years. But, since 2002, the number of students with learning disabilities has been on the decline, by almost two percent per year. This decline could be a result of many factors. One possibility is

that we now have a better understanding of early childhood education. We are now taking more action and working to ensure that our students are more prepared for school. It is also possible that there are improvements in reading instruction. Since this is the most common difficulty among students with a learning disability, improved reading instruction helps lower the number of students identified with a learning disability. There has also been a shift in the approach to identifying students with learning disabilities (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). Reid, et al. (2013) point out, prior to 2004 when IDEA was revamped, students were classified with a learning disability based on formulas. Students were classified with a learning disability if the gap between their scores on their intelligence tests and their standardized tests was large enough. So, they would figure out the presumed ability of a child and compare it to their current ability and determine whether or not they had a learning disability (Reid, et al., 2013). Cortiella and Horowitz (2014) explain the Response to Intervention (RTI) method that is currently used to identify learning disabilities. RTI is a tiered system of support that provides assistance for students prior to determining whether or not they have a learning disability. This is a three-tiered system that adjusts to the needs of the student. The teacher begins with whole class instruction. If that isn't working for the student, then the teacher works with the student in small groups. If that doesn't work, then the student will receive smaller group instruction, or even one-on-one instruction. The student is constantly being monitored based on their performance levels and progress. When all these approaches aren't what is best for the student, then special education services are looked at. This new approach helps minimize the number of students being classified with a learning disability. This approach can also be used in the general education classroom, especially when students with learning disabilities are in the classroom. Currently,

66% of students with learning disabilities spend majority, around 80% or more, of their school day in a general education classroom (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014).

Cortiella and Horowitz (2014) point out, of the 2.4 million students with learning disabilities, two-thirds of them are males, although males and females with learning disabilities are about even in enrollment in public schools. Generally, black and Hispanic students are overrepresented in the category of learning disabilities. Overrepresentation occurs when the percentage of students in special education of a certain minority or ethnic group is greater than the group's percentage in the state's total enrollment in public school. White and Asian students are often underrepresented in the same category, meaning that their percentages in special education are lower than the group's percentage in the state's public schools. In order to avoid overrepresentation or underrepresentation, the percentages for a certain group, in both special education and general education, should be about the same (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014).

Reid, et al. (2013) explain the characteristics that students with learning disabilities often portray. One of these characteristics is a lack of attention. There are three important factors of attention, which would include task engagement, maintaining focus, and selective attention. Students with learning disabilities are often off task in the classroom; they have a hard time staying on task if they are left on their own to do the work. They also have a hard time maintaining focus. Students with learning disabilities are often seen as “spacey” or “distractible.” They have a hard time focusing on the task at hand and can be easily distracted or sidetracked. Students with learning disabilities are also challenged by choosing where to place their attention. They have problems with selective attention and have difficulty deciding between what is important and what is not. Another characteristic of students with learning disabilities is being challenged by their memory. They often struggle with remembering the important information

that they need. This could be due to lack of background knowledge or not using strategies to help with memorization. Students with learning disabilities generally have less background knowledge about a topic, which makes it more challenging for them to remember that information. They also tend to struggle with recall. These students are less likely to use strategies, like chunking or repetition, to help them memorize information. Students with learning disabilities also have a negative attribution process. When they are successful academically, they claim it was due to external factors, like an easy test or being lucky. When they are not successful, they claim it was due to internal factors, such as not being smart or not having the skills for that task. They don't take any credit for their successes, only their failures. Learned Helplessness is also portrayed by students with learning disabilities. They feel that no matter what they do, they are just going to fail. These students do not believe that they will succeed in many tasks (Reid, et al., 2013). Kavale and Forness (1996) claim that around 70% of students with learning disabilities exhibit this characteristic. The last characteristic that Reid, et al. (2013) explains is the lack of coordinated strategies. These students often fail to respond to the requirements of an academic task in an appropriate manner. They struggle to find the appropriate strategies to use and lack the understanding of when to use strategies. Students with learning disabilities fail to use the appropriate methods to help themselves succeed in an academic setting (Reid, et al., 2013).

Dysgraphia

Dysgraphia is the most common writing disability. Sousa (2001) explains dysgraphia as a disorder that causes difficulty with writing letters and numbers. Individuals with this disorder struggle to use the appropriate movements that are required to write letters and numbers. Students with dysgraphia have poor handwriting. They struggle to form the correct letters and

numbers, which will create an additional challenge to learning. Students experiencing these challenges often exhibit certain characteristics in their writing. Their writing is generally slow, is inconsistent with letter formation, has reduced legibility, shows a mix-up of letters, has unfinished words or letters, lacks use of appropriate formatting and spacing, and students have a strange pencil grip and hand position (Sousa, 2001). Cortiella and Horowitz (2014) also explain that students with dysgraphia often tire quickly while writing, have difficulty writing on a line or within the margins, have trouble with organizing their thoughts on paper, and have difficulty with syntax and grammar of the written language. Sousa (2001) points out that the types of dysgraphia can vary. There are three types of dysgraphia, which include dyslexic dysgraphia, motor clumsiness dysgraphia, and spatial dysgraphia. Dyslexic dysgraphia is a result of a student's problems in phoneme-to-grapheme conversions. Motor clumsiness dysgraphia results from a student's lack of control over their fingers, wrist, and hand. Spatial dysgraphia exhibits a student's deficit in their spatial processing systems of the brain's right hemisphere. These all are different forms of dysgraphia that affect student's writing in different ways. Determining which form of dysgraphia a student may have depends on the different characteristics that the student exhibits while they are writing (Sousa, 2001).

Sousa (2001) states that dysgraphia doesn't usually occur on its own. Students with dysgraphia often experience other challenges as well. These would include sequencing problems, Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), auditory processing disorders, and visual processing disorders. Students with sequencing problems present challenges with ordering numbers, letters, and words while writing. This causes students to focus more on the structure and formatting of their letters and words, rather than the content of the writing. Students with ADHD struggle with their writing. Their brain is moving at a faster pace than they can write and

they do not have the fine motor skills to keep up with their processing speed. Auditory processing disorders present students with the challenge of using expressive language. Writing is the hardest form of expressive language, which makes it difficult for students with both disorders. Visual processing disorders are rare to have with dysgraphia, but when these two disorders combine, students have a hard time with writing since they cannot process the information that they are putting down on paper (Sousa, 2001).

Writing with Students with Learning Disabilities

According to Sousa (2001), writing is a complex process which involves many different areas of the brain to work together. Writing involves attention, fine motor skill harmonization, memory, visual processing, language, and high-order thinking. All of these processes need to work together in order for one to successfully write. While writing, students need to have receptive and expressive language skills, working cognitive operations, and emotional stability. They also need to understand the proper forms of organization, and need to follow rules or punctuation, spelling, grammar, and syntax. Without the alignment of these factors, writing becomes challenging and frustrating (Sousa, 2001). Reid, et al. (2013) points out the reasons why students with learning disabilities struggle while writing. One reason is due to the demands writing places on an individual. Writing involves multiple different processes, which can become overwhelming for student with learning disabilities. The second reason these students are challenged is because they fail to use effective strategies. Students with learning disabilities often forget to use strategies and lack the self-regulation and attention that they need to use strategies while they are writing. Writing is a challenging task for students with learning disabilities (Reid, et al., 2013).

Sousa (2001) explains there are three different reasons why writing may be such a daunting task for students. One possible reason for this would be due to the environmental factors. These factors would include issues such as how much time was spent on writing in the student's early years or how writing is taught. Students don't see the importance of learning to write and when they aren't given the appropriate instruction and time for writing, it becomes a challenging task for the students. Another possible reason why writing may be a challenge is due to systematic factors. In the early years, teachers rely on the students to use inventive spelling and don't focus on the mechanics enough. Students write how they think they should and the more they do it without it being corrected, the more likely they are to continue those writing behaviors. This makes writing challenging for students because it is hard to change their ways to the correct behaviors after they have been writing incorrectly for so long. The last possible reason as to why writing may be challenging is due to neurological factors. There are many different neural systems that work together to complete the task of writing. Since writing relies on all of these different systems to be working properly, when something goes wrong, students struggle with writing. When presented with this challenge, students focus more on the process of writing that they forget to focus on the content of their writing (Sousa, 2001).

There are many problems that students with learning disabilities face with writing. Wong (2000) states that these students are generally more challenged by writing than their peers are, with writing that is not as legible, effective, detailed, and understandable as their peers. There are five main ways that students with learning disabilities are different from their peers. One way is that students with learning disabilities struggle to clearly express their ideas in writing. They also don't really understand what good writing is. They focus more on the mechanics and process rather than the content of the piece. Another difference is that students with learning disabilities

fail to use the appropriate strategies as they are writing. They also tend to make a larger amount of errors in their writing piece. The last difference between students with learning disabilities and their peers is that students with learning disabilities need more practice than their peers to develop the writing strategies that should be learned. Students with learning disabilities don't understand the importance of writing and they fail to recognize the steps that are involved in writing. These students need to learn that writing is a complex process that involves planning, organizing, and revising. Students with learning disabilities tend to skip the planning process. They just want to get the work done and just want to get information down on the page. These students also forget about organization and flow and just work to add any information that they can (Wong, 2000). Englert and Mariage (1991) explain that students with learning disabilities are often unfamiliar with text patterns and structure. They often fail to recognize and understand text patterns in writing pieces and then fail to apply them in their own writing (Englert & Mariage, 1991). Wong (2000) states the last step to writing is revision. Students with learning disabilities are often faced with more revision that needs to be done, due to their more frequent mechanical errors. These students focus more on the mechanical revisions to make their piece look better, rather than content revision (Wong, 2000). Students with learning disabilities are challenged by many different factors of writing and they lack the appropriate understandings to decrease the difficulties that they face. Helping students develop these understandings will help make writing a less stressful and more enjoyable process for students with learning disabilities.

Useful Instructional Strategies for Students with Learning Disabilities

Himmele and Himmele (2011) explain the importance of engagement. Students need to be actively participating in a lesson. They need to be cognitively engaged in order to get the most out of the lesson. When teaching, it is important to avoid a lecture style classroom. It is not an

effective or engaging method of teaching. Students are not supposed to just sit there and absorb information. They need to be active members in their learning. Students need to be working hands-on with material and need the opportunities to discuss and question the material at hand. Being engaged in the lesson helps students take their thinking to a deeper level and enables them to become more connected with the material. Engagement helps all students become important, active members of the classroom (Himmele & Himmele, 2011).

An important instructional approach to take with students with learning disabilities is explicit instruction or strategy instruction. Archer and Hughes (2011) explain explicit instruction as direct, structured, and systematic. Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2009) portray explicit instruction as teacher-centered, direct instruction. In this method of instruction, the teacher chooses what to teach and clearly expresses the objectives of the lesson. The students are directly taught the concepts and skills that are to be covered in that lesson. Explicit instruction is designed to help reach all students by activating prior knowledge, building concepts and skills, and giving practice, both guided and independent. Throughout the lesson, the teacher is checking for the students' understanding of the material. The teacher is also explaining, modeling, and demonstrating the material prior to leaving the students on their own with the material (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009). Archer and Hughes point out that using explicit instruction provides a system of supports for the learners. In a lesson, students are guided through their learning with clear explanations and demonstrations. Ellis and Worthington (1994) show that when explicit instruction is used, students are spending more time engaged and on task, they are more successful in learning the material, they are spending more time in group instruction, are receiving scaffolded (supported/guided) instruction, and are using different forms of knowledge.

These aspects of explicit instruction are useful and important for students to be exposed to as they are learning (Ellis & Worthington, 1994).

Koeing (2010) points out the four levels that exist in explicit instruction. The first level is focus, model, and reflect on the strategy. In this level, the teacher explains the strategy that they are going to use and why it is important for them to learn about. The teacher will then model the strategy and then will explain the strategy and how the students can use it. In the second level, the class will practice problem solving with the strategy using concrete materials. In this level, the whole class works together to practice using the strategy. Then they work in small groups, eventually working to practice the strategy on their own. The third level is apply the strategy to a problem solving task. This level proceeds in a similar manner to the second level. First, the teacher models applying the strategy to a reading, writing, or problem solving task. Then the class works as a whole to apply it, then in small groups, and finally independently. The fourth level of explicit instruction is transferring the strategy to problem solving tasks. In this level, the class reflects on the strategy they learned and how they can use it. The teacher models the use of the strategy in a different setting than they had been working on it with. Following the teacher's modeling, the whole class practices transferring what they have learned to a different situation. Then they work in small groups and finally independently, going through the same process (Koeing, 2010). Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2009) explain that this approach of explicit instruction is more effective for students, and especially for struggling learners. This is a more efficient approach to teaching that will help reach all students (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009). Reid, et al. (2013) explains that using this approach will help students with learning disabilities learn the strategies that they need to succeed. Since students with learning disabilities fail to use strategies while they are learning, directly teaching them the strategies that they need and making

sure that they understand when and how to use the strategy will help them become more successful in school. Giving students with learning disabilities the strategies that they need in order to learn will help them become more independent in their learning. It will also help increase their confidence and will help guide them away from their learned helplessness state of mind (Reid, et al., 2013).

Sousa (2001) explains the importance of strategy instruction when trying to help students with learning disabilities. Using this type of instruction helps students with learning disabilities become more successful in using strategies and accomplishing academic tasks. Teachers need to choose strategies that are appropriate for their students and the activity that they will be doing. Choosing a strategy involves thinking about the academic task that the students are going to be doing and thinking about the level of the student. Picking a strategy that corresponds with the needs of the student helps them see the strategy as important and motivates them to learn the strategy. When working with these students, teachers need to make sure that students understand the strategy and when it can be used. Teachers need to clearly explain the strategies. The students need to know the name of the strategy and how it works. Then, teachers need to model how to use the strategy, which is then followed by guided practice. The teacher walks the students through the strategy. Independent practice is the last step; the teacher needs to give the students a chance to practice their new strategy in a variety of scenarios. As the students are independently practicing, the teacher needs to provide feedback and make sure that the students fully understand how to use the strategy (Sousa, 2001). Fisher and Frey (2014) refer to this model as the Gradual Release of Responsibility. This is a model that is designed to start with a large portion of responsibility of the learning on the teacher. As the class progresses through the lesson, the responsibility shifts more and more to the students, who eventually end up with full

responsibility. The first part of the lesson is focused instruction where the teacher takes control (“I do it”). Then, the next part is guided instruction, where the teacher walks the students through the strategy (“We do it”). The next step is collaborative learning, where the students work together with help from the teacher if necessary (“You do it together”). The final step is independent learning, where the students are working on their own (“You do it alone”). This is a method that is designed to slowly release the responsibility of learning into the students hands (Fisher & Frey, 2014).

Strategies

Reid, et al. (2013) explain that students with learning disabilities often struggle to use strategies. They fail to apply strategies as they are attempting a school assignment. Students with learning disabilities don’t use the strategies that they need in order to successfully complete an academic task (Reid, et al., 2013). Teaching these students the appropriate strategies for writing will help them become more successful and effective writers. These students need to learn different strategies for planning, composing, and revising their writing.

Planning Strategies

Students with learning disabilities often struggle to organize their writing. As Wong (2000) points out, students with learning disabilities fail to plan out their writing. They often skip the planning stage and jump straight to composing, just looking to getting information down on the page. When they skip the planning stage, their writing is often disorganized and jumbled, with information randomly placed and out of order (Wong, 2000). Teaching students with learning disabilities to use strategies to help them plan and organize their writing will help them become more effective writers and will enable them to clearly express their thoughts and ideas.

Some strategies that may be useful for students with learning disabilities to use are graphic organizers, SPOT, STORE, TREE, and STOP and LIST.

Mather, et al. (2009) explains that graphic organizers are a tool that students can use to help organize and plan out their writing. There are many different forms of graphic organizers, but they are all there to help students plan out their writing and provide a way for them to keep their ideas organized. Some forms of graphic organizers include sequential paragraph organizer, compare and contrast organizer, Venn diagrams, descriptive organizer, and cause and effect organizer (Mather, et al., 2009). One graphic organizer that may be useful is writing wheels, introduced by Rooney (1990). This is a descriptive graphic organizer where there are a series of circles on the page, generally five, that are used to help separate the main idea and supporting details. The top circle is for the main idea. The three middle circles are there for the student to write in three supporting details, one in each circle. The last circle is used to write the conclusion. Then, in their writing piece, the students expand their writing, using the circles as a guide (Rooney, 1990). Another descriptive graphic organizer, introduced by Hyerle (2004), that can be used is the Tree Map. This allows students to plan out the main ideas at the top of the tree and then on the branches, the students can plan out their supporting details. A sequential form of graphic organizer that can be used is a flow chart. Students can use a flow chart to organize their work and helps them put their information into the correct sequence (Hyerle, 2004). Graphic organizers can come in many different shapes and forms. They can be used for many different types of writing and will be beneficial for students with learning disabilities to use. Using this strategy will help these students get their writing organized and planned out.

Mather, et al. (2009) introduce the SPOT strategy for planning prior to composing their writing piece. This is a mnemonic to help students think about the story that they are going to be

writing. S refers to the setting. It is supposed to help the student think about where their story will take place and what characters are going to be involved. P refers to the problem in the story. Students need to think about what sort of conflict is going to exist in their story. O refers to the order of events. It is a step to help the students plan out the events that are going to happen in their story and gets them organized. T stands for the ending of the tale. They are supposed to create their ending. Using the SPOT strategy helps the students plan out their writing and gives them a way to help remember what elements need to be included when they are writing a story (Mather, et al., 2009).

Mather and Jaffe (2002) describe another strategy for story writing known as STORE. This is a strategy to help students plan out their story using the mnemonic of STORE. STORE stands for Setting, Trouble, Order of events, Resolution, Ending. Setting is asking the students to think about where their story is going to take place. They need to think about who, what, where, and when, while they are working with their setting. Trouble is asking the students to think about what kind of problem is going to exist in their story. Order of events requires the students to think about what is going to happen in their story. They need to determine what kinds of things are going to happen and what order they are going to happen in. Resolution is telling the students to describe how the problem was solved in the story. They need to figure out how they are going to solve the issues that are presented in the story. Ending is asking the students to wrap up their story and decide how it is going to end. This is a useful strategy that will help students recognize the different parts of the story. It will also help them plan out their work and will make it easier for the students to complete their writing piece, since it is already all planned out and organized. This will be a useful strategy to help students plan out and organize their work before writing it

out, which is a step that students with learning disabilities often skip when they are writing (Mather & Jaffe, 2002).

Graham and Harris (2005) present the TREE strategy for preparing essays. In this strategy, students are generating prompts to help them organize and plan their essay. TREE is a mnemonic that will help students remember all the parts they need for a persuasive essay. T stands for create a Topic sentence. R stands for Reasons that support your opinion. E stands for Examine reasons to determine whether or not the audience will believe your claim. The last E stands for create your Ending. This strategy helps students plan out their essay before they start writing. This is a useful strategy that will help students remember the components they need for their essay and will help them get everything planned out prior to composing their piece (Graham & Harris, 2005).

Graham and Harris (2005) introduce the STOP and LIST strategy to help students plan their writing. The first step is to STOP which tells the students to Stop and Think of Purposes. This reminds students to stop and think about their goals and purpose for their writing piece. The second step is to LIST, which requires the students to List Ideas and Sequence Them. Students use this step to brainstorm ideas for their writing piece. Once they get all their ideas down, the students go through their ideas and organize them sequentially. This strategy helps students plan out their work, while making sure that their piece is going to be organized as well. This helps keep the purpose of the piece in mind and helps the students plan out their writing. The mnemonic of STOP and LIST will help the students remember what they need to do as they are planning their writing. It will be a useful strategy for students with learning disabilities. It will help them get their writing planned out and organized before they begin writing (Graham & Harris, 2005).

Composing Strategies

Composing a writing piece may be a difficult task for students with learning disabilities. As Sousa (2011) explains, writing is a complex process that involves many different things, such as spelling, grammar, and formatting. Wong (2000) explains that these students tend to focus more on the appearance of their writing rather than the content of their writing. They pay more attention to making sure their piece looks neat and presentable, rather than making sure that their piece is clear, coherent, and free of errors (Wong, 2000). There are different strategies that may help students with learning disabilities focus more on the piece that they are writing. Some of these strategies include the use of technology, mentor texts, PLEASE, POWER, and Suggest-Choose-Plan-Compose.

One strategy that may be useful for writing with students with learning disabilities is the use of technology. Mather, et al. (2009) explains that when students with learning disabilities use computers for writing, the quality of their writing is often much better. There are many different programs that students could use to produce their writing (Mather, et al., 2009). Using a computer would help students focus more on the content of their writing rather than the appearance of their writing. Sousa (2001) explains that using a computer can help the student organize their thoughts, order their thoughts, and will help them with their spelling. It would also be a quicker process for producing more legible writing, especially for those students who struggle to write legibly and clearly (Sousa, 2001). Zhang, Brooks, and Fields (1995) explain one program that students could use is ROBO Writer. This is a computer program that students can use to create a writing piece. This program is designed with a series of word lists that can help the students when they are struggling with a word. It also has a speech synthesis system that pronounces words to the students in a robot voice, so they can hear what they are entering into

the computer. The ROBO Writer program is also icon driven, so students don't need to remember specific commands; there are buttons for them to use for different processes they may need. There is also an explanation of the different functions, such as the shift key, as the students are using them. When the students are finished with their work, the program is designed to print it in the form of an attractive certificate. This technology is very beneficial for students with learning disabilities. It allows the students to forget about the mechanics and appearance of their writing and allows them to focus on the writing process and the content of the writing. This program also helps keep students with learning disabilities on task and helps increase the quality of their writing (Zhang, et al., 1995).

Using mentor texts is another strategy that can be used to help students with their writing. Morrow (2012) explains that mentor texts are used to show the students what kind of writing they need to do. They are used as a model and are a way to represent the writing that students should try to achieve (Morrow, 2012). Paquette (2007) explains that that mentor texts allow the students to see how their writing should be crafted. Mentor texts can also be used as a way to help motivate and engage students in their writing (Paquette, 2007). Gallagher (2014) states that students need to have examples of text so they know what is expected of them in their writing. This will be a beneficial strategy for students with learning disabilities. Reid, et al. (2013) point out that students with learning disabilities struggle with organization of their paper and often fail to follow text patterns. Using mentor texts can help show students what kind of text patterns and organization that they need to follow (Reid, et al., 2013).

Welch (1992) introduces the PLEASE strategy as a way to help students develop paragraphs. P stands for Pick. They need to pick their topic, audience, and type of paragraph that they are writing. L stands for List. In this step, students are to create a list of ideas that they may

want to use in the paragraph. E stands for Evaluate. Students need to look at their list and make sure all the ideas they listed are important and relevant to their paragraph. A stands for Activate. In this step, students begin their paragraph by starting with a topic sentence that will introduce their topic. S stands for Supply. Students will use information from their list and will begin to construct sentences to help support their topic sentence. E stands for End. This is the final step, where the students will write a concluding sentence. Students also look over their paragraph for any revisions that might need to be made. Using the PLEASE strategy helps students realize the steps they need to take while writing paragraphs and helps them write more effectively. It helps these students write more complete paragraphs and helps them feel more confident in their ability to write paragraphs (Welch, 1992).

Englert, Raphael, and Anderson (1992) suggest the POWER strategy for writing pieces. This strategy involves all the different stages of writing. The mnemonic POWER stands for Plan, Organize, Write, Edit, and Revise. The first step is to plan. The student needs to choose their topic, think about who their audience is, establish their purpose, and brainstorming ideas for their writing. The next step is to organize. In this step, the student needs to order their ideas and determine what needs to go where in their writing piece. The third step students need to take is to write. Students use their planning and organizing to write out a draft of their work. They will need to include an introduction, body, and conclusion to their work and will also need to make sure to add details and other information that may not have been included on their planning and organizing sheets. The fourth step is to edit. This is a peer editing system where students will read the works of their peers and determine what is good, what is unclear, and what parts need some more work. The last step is to revise. The student will take the information they received from their peers and decide what revisions they need to make to their paper. This will be a useful

strategy for students with learning disabilities to use. POWER will help them take all the steps necessary for a writing piece. Using this strategy will keep these students from skipping the planning and revising stages of writing. It will help students become more familiar with all the stages of writing and will help them become more comfortable with each aspect of writing. This strategy will also help students make sure they are including enough information. It will help develop their writing and will help make their writing stronger and more effective as well (Englert, Raphael, & Anderson, 1992).

Revising Strategies

Students with learning disabilities often struggle with revision. Sometimes, it is such a large task to complete a writing piece, the last thing they want to do is to go back and fix up their writing. Wong (2000) states that students with learning disabilities often have more revision that needs to be done, since they tend to make mechanical errors more frequently. They often focus on fixing up their mechanical errors and often neglect to make any content adjustments (Wong, 2000). Mather, et al. (2009) point out that the revision process should focus more on the content, not the mechanics. Revision should be centered on organization, clarification, and elaboration of ideas (Mather, et al., 2009). Teaching students revision strategies will help keep their focus on the content, rather than the grammatical errors. Learning revision strategies will help students with learning disabilities become more familiar and comfortable with revising their work. Strategies that may be useful are CDO, peer revision, and TAPS.

Graham (1997) introduces CDO revision strategy. This is a revising strategy that takes the student through their paper sentence by sentence. CDO stands for Compare, Diagnose, Operate. Compare tells the student to read over their sentence. Diagnose tells the student to determine what they need to do with that sentence. There are a series of cards that are associated

with this strategy for this step that the students use to determine what the sentence does for their paper. The evaluation cards may say things like “This is not useful to my paper”, “This doesn’t sound right”, “People might not understand this part”, “This isn’t what I meant to say”, “People won’t be interested in this part”, or “This is good.” These cards help the writer determine what they need to do to revise their paper. The last step is to Operate. There are a series of cards to go along with this step as well. They are known as the tactic cards, which may say things like “rewrite”, “add more”, “leave this part out”, or “change the wording.” These help the student decide what operation they need to perform in order to revise their work. This is a good process for students to go through. The CDO strategy will help the students go through their whole writing piece and will help them see where they need to make revisions and will help guide them through their revision process. This mnemonic will give the students an easy way to remember the steps they need to take while revising their writing (Graham, 1997).

MacArthur, Graham, and Schwartz (1991) explain the peer revising strategy. This revision strategy involves two parts. One part focuses on revising the content of the piece and the other part focuses on editing the mechanics of the piece. With this strategy, the student exchanges their writing piece with a peer and they revise each other’s work. The first part is known as revising. In this step, the student is listening and following along as their peer reads their paper. The listener tells their peer what they paper was about and what they liked the most about it. Then they will read the paper on their own and make notes throughout the paper thinking about things such as clarity and amount of detail. Then, they will share their suggestions with their peer. The second step is known as editing. In this step, the student will go through the work of their peer, checking for errors in sentences, capitals, punctuation, and spelling. Then they will share their suggestions with their peer. This strategy would be a useful strategy for all

students to revise their writing. This allows the students to work together with their peers and gives them an opportunity to talk through their writing and receive feedback. Peer revising will also help students learn to revise papers on their own, since they will be practicing revising papers with a peer. It will also help students learn to collaborate with others and will let them see the benefits of working together while revising their writing (MacArthur, et al., 1991).

Mather, et al. (2009) propose the revision strategy known as TAPS. This is a peer revision strategy that provides the editors with prompts to follow to provide feedback to their peer's paper. TAPS is a mnemonic that students can use to help them remember the appropriate steps to revising the writing of their peers. T stands for Tell the person what you liked about the paper. A stands for Ask questions about parts that may be confusing. P stands for Provide suggestions for making the paper better. S stands for Share the revised paper. This strategy will be useful for students with learning disabilities. It will give them a way to remember what steps they should take when revising their writing. The TAPS strategy will also help students focus more on revising the content of the piece, rather than the mechanics of the writing (Mather, et al., 2009).

Why do These Students Need our Help?

Cortiella and Horowitz (2014) explain that students with learning disabilities are continuing to fall further and further behind. In regards to academic performance, students with learning disabilities are consistently below average when compared to their peers. Students with learning disabilities are more likely to be below average or very below average in reading and math, rather than average or above average. As students with learning disabilities get older, the gap between their performance and the performance of their peers continues to grow (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). Students with learning disabilities need our help in order to improve their

writing and become more effective in communicating their thoughts and ideas through written expression. Reid, et al. (2013) and Kittle (2014) explain the importance of writing in society today. It is a crucial skill that all individuals should learn. It is more than just a requirement for school, it is a part of our everyday life (Reid, et al., 2013; Kittle, 2014). Kittle (2014) explains that writing is a process that helps us understand the world that we live in today. Writing helps us think and gives us the opportunity to show the world what we know and believe about certain topics. Writing helps us express our ideas, which is a process that occurs in many aspects of everyday life, not just in a classroom (Kittle, 2014). So, students need to be proficient in writing and it is up to the teachers to help their students become effective writers.

Graham (2006) points out that the amount that a student learns is often based off of written products, such as essays, tests, reports, and written homework answers. Being proficient in writing is also a critical skill needed to get through school. Zabala, et al. (2007) explains that passing a written examination is often required to graduate high school. Reid, et al. (2013) emphasize that students with learning disabilities tend to get caught in a cycle of failure. Having a learning disability leads these students to slower development of their academic abilities. They fall farther and farther behind and struggle to catch up to their peers (Reid, et al., 2013). Cortiella and Horowitz (2014) point out that in high school, students with learning disabilities struggle to keep their grades up and are more likely to fail classes. Dropping out of high school is common among students with learning disabilities as well. 19% of students with learning disabilities drop out of high school, although 68% of students with learning disabilities are graduating from high school with a regular high school diploma, while 12% are receiving certificates of completion. Students with learning disabilities are often more likely to be held

back a grade. Students who have to repeat two grades have almost a 100% chance of dropping out of school (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014).

Graham and Harris (2011) say that proficient writing skills are also needed for acquiring a job. There are many jobs, regardless of the nature of the job, which require effective writing. With these factors in mind, students with learning disabilities need to become proficient writers. Nineteen out of twenty students with learning disabilities do not acquire the skills they need to become proficient writers. Failing to gain these skills puts students with learning disabilities at an academic disadvantage and make them less likely to successfully enter into employment due to their difficulties with written expression (Graham & Harris, 2011). Students with learning disabilities need our help. They need to be given the appropriate support in elementary school in order to help them become more successful students in high school, college, and employment.

In summary, chapter two reviewed literature of writing, students with learning disabilities, and writing with students with learning disabilities. It provided evidence-based instructional strategies and strategies for planning, composing, and revising. In addition, it discussed the importance of helping our students with writing. Chapter three discussed the methodology of the project.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Chapter three provided insight into the process for lesson planning. There was a discussion of what format was to be used for the lesson plans. Also, there was a brief discussion of how to choose a strategy along with a quick explanation to what each lesson of the unit entails. This set up the unit plan that was discussed further in chapter four.

While conducting this research, I synthesized information on writing, students with learning disabilities, writing with students with learning disabilities, and strategies to help improve the writing of these students. Then I used the information that I had collected and synthesized to create a unit plan that would help teachers assist students with learning disabilities improve their writing. A unit plan was created as a set of three lessons on the same topic. While creating this unit plan, I used the Elementary Education edTPA lesson plan template (SCALE, 2014), which includes sections on content standards, learning objectives, learning targets, accommodations and modifications, instructional resources and materials, assessments, instructional strategies and learning tasks, relevant theories/ research best practices, and a lesson plan timeline. These lesson plans provided an example of how teachers could teach and use strategies for writing while working with students with learning disabilities. In order to create these lesson plans, it is important to know how to choose a strategy to teach, how to teach it, and what requirements there are for lesson plans.

When planning a lesson, Reeves (2011) explains the five steps that should be taken when thinking about planning a lesson. The first thing is to plan how to get the students thinking. Bringing in background knowledge and having the students think about what they already know is important. The second step is to plan how you are going to help the students learn the new information. Teachers need to make sure that the lesson is going to be accessible to all students

in the classroom. Next, teachers need to figure out how they are going to help students connect their new information to the information that they already know. Finding a way to have the material stick with the students is important. Teachers also need to plan how they are going to assess the students' understanding and how they are going to appropriately give feedback throughout the lesson. Finally, the teacher needs to plan how to close the lesson. They need an effective way to wrap up the lesson and have the students reflect on what they have learned (Reeves, 2011).

According to Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2009), there are specific components to a lesson plan that are associated with explicit / strategy instruction. These components would include learning objectives, activation of prior knowledge, concept development, skill development, lesson importance, guided practice, lesson closure, and independent practice. Learning objectives are statements that explain what the students are going to be able to accomplish after the lesson is over. Activation of prior knowledge involves helping students connect the knowledge they already have to the new material they are going to be working with so they have something to build off of as they are learning new material. Concept development involves teaching the students the material that is covered in the learning objectives. Skill development is teaching students the strategies they need in order to reach the learning objective. Lesson importance is making sure that the students know why they are learning the material and why it is relevant. Guided practice is working with the students on the problems and helping them get through them successfully. Lesson closure involves having students work on questions or problems that show that they have learned the concepts and skills that they were supposed to learn. Independent practice is giving the students the opportunity to practice on their own and work to successfully complete the problems or questions they are presented with (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009).

The components that Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2009) discuss as important components to a lesson plan are similar to the edTPA lesson plan template that I will be working with. In the edTPA lesson plan, there is a section for learning objectives, which accomplishes the same task that Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2009) explain. The activation of prior knowledge is not a section on the lesson plan, but it can be incorporated into both the instructional strategies and learning tasks and the lesson plan timeline sections. Concept development would be similar to the standards section. The standards that are listed explain the concepts that the students are supposed to develop over time. Skill development is represented through the learning targets. The learning targets are representative of skills that students may be working to develop throughout the lesson. Lesson importance can be seen through the learning objectives. These explain what the students are supposed to get out of the lesson and can show the students why the lesson and activities are important. Guided practice, independent practice, and lesson closure are not sections on the edTPA template, but elements of these can be seen in both the instructional strategies and learning tasks and the lesson plan timeline sections. The edTPA template also has additional information, such as assessment opportunities, accommodations and modifications, instructional materials, and relevant theories and/or research best practices. The ideas explained by both Reeves (2011) and Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2009), along with the edTPA lesson plan template will be used to help plan the unit plan.

Within the proposed unit plan, I, as the teacher, planned to guide the students to work on planning, composing, and revising an opinion paragraph on the topic of their choice. In each lesson, the students will be learning a strategy to assist them in each step of the writing process. Each lesson will also follow the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model from Fisher and Frey (2014) and Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2009). In lesson one, the students will be planning their

writing. In order for the students to plan their opinion paragraph, they will be using the TREE strategy from Graham and Harris (2005). This is a planning strategy where they will use a graphic organizer to work through the steps of planning a writing piece. For this lesson, the materials needed include pencils, the list of ideas to spark students' thinking (Appendix A), TREE graphic organizer (Appendix B), and the Smart Board. In lesson two, the students will be learning how use mentor texts to help them write their piece. The idea of using mentor texts comes from Morrow (2012), Paquette (2007), Gallagher (2013), and Reid, et al. (2013). The students will use mentor texts as a model for their writing and will compose their opinion paragraph. For this lesson, the teacher will need to make sure that the following materials are available: pencils, writing paper, Smart Board, mentor text example, and the TREE graphic organizers from lesson one. For lesson three, the students will be learning a strategy to help them revise their writing. In this lesson, the students will be learning the CDO revision strategy from Graham (1997). The students will be using a strategy that involves the use of evaluation cards to help them revise their paragraph. For this lesson, the materials needed include the students' opinion paragraphs from lesson two, pencils/colored pens, the CDO evaluation cards (Appendix C), and writing paper. For the assessment piece, each lesson will consist of informal and formal assessments. In each lesson, the informal assessments consist of observations and monitoring. The teacher will be sure to address any students' misunderstandings as the lesson progresses. The formal assessment is a little different for each lesson. In lesson one, the students will be handing in their graphic organizers to be assessed for completion and for student understanding of the TREE strategy. For lesson two, the students will be turning in their opinion paragraph and will also be asked to write notes on a sticky note indicating how they used the mentor text. At the end of lesson three, the students will be turning in their marked up paragraph along with a

rewritten paragraph. In order to assess these components, the teacher will use a rubric (Appendix D). Lesson plans within this unit were discussed further in next chapter.

Chapter 4: Unit Plan

This chapter focused on the unit plan, which was composed of three lessons following the edTPA guidelines. The topic of this unit plan was opinion writing. The students will be writing a paragraph, about a topic of their choice, which will go through the planning, composing, and revising stages. Lesson one is the planning stage. In this lesson, the students are learning the TREE strategy. This is a planning strategy to help students remember each component of their writing that needs to be planned out. Lesson two is the composing stage. In this lesson, the students are learning how to use mentor texts to aid in their writing process. They are using their planning from lesson 1 to help them write their paragraph as well. Lesson three is the revising stage. In this lesson, the students are learning the CDO revision strategy, which will ask the students to work through their piece, sentence by sentence. This unit plan will work the students through the planning, composing, and revising stages of writing.

Lesson Plan 1

Grade Level: 3

Subject / Content area: Writing

Unit of Study: Opinion Paragraphs

Lesson Title: Planning our Opinion Paragraph

<p>Central Focus for the learning segment: Given a choice of topic, the students will have opportunities to plan, compose, and revise an opinion paragraph (of 7 sentences) on a topic, supporting their statement with at least 5 details.</p>	
<p>Content Standard(s): CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.1.A – Introduce the topic or text that they are writing about, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure that lists reasons. CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.1.B – Provide reasons that support the opinion. CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.2.A - Capitalize appropriate words in titles. CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.3.A - Choose words and phrases for effect.</p>	
<p>Learning Objectives associated with the content standards:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Using a graphic organizer, the students will have opportunities to plan their opinion paragraph by completely filling out the graphic organizer (including a title, topic sentence, 5 supporting details, and an ending for their paragraph). 	
<p>Instructional Resources and Materials to engage students in learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of ideas to spark students’ thinking (Appendix A) TREE Graphic Organizer (Appendix B) Pencils Smart Board or Chart Paper 	
<p>Instructional Strategies and Learning Tasks that support diverse student needs. (Include what you and students will be doing.):</p> <p>Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (Fisher & Frey, 2014; Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009)</p>	
Instructional Strategy	Learning Task
Focused Instruction	The teacher will explain the TREE strategy, from Graham and Harris (2005), and how to use it when planning writing pieces. The teacher will inform the students of the different steps involved and will show the students the graphic organizer and what information goes in each part.
Guided Instruction	As a class, a topic will be chosen for an example. The teacher and the students will work together to fill out a sample graphic organizer with the topic that was chosen. Then, the teacher will show the list of ideas to spark the students’ thoughts and will ask for any other suggestions for topics. The teacher will add the ideas to the class list, so the students will have a reference for ideas.

Collaborative Learning	The students will work together to brainstorm ideas for their opinion pieces. Together, they will talk out their ideas for their piece. Once they decided what they want to write about, they will be talking about the supporting details that they need to include. Then, once they have talked about their ideas, they will move onto the independent work.
Independent Learning	The teacher will be walking around the classroom and assisting students as necessary. The students will be working independently, applying the skills that they learned throughout the lesson to a new task. The students will be using the TREE strategy to fill out the graphic organizer with the information for their opinion paragraph.

Differentiation and planned universal supports:

- The students who need less support with planning out their essay can create their own graphic organizer to use for the TREE strategy.
- Collaborative learning will be beneficial for all students. They will be able to work with a peer to discuss and clarify their ideas.
- Visuals-students will have the graphic organizer to keep track of their thoughts and will help them plan for their writing.
- Modeling- the teacher will be modeling the process before the students are required to use it.
- Audio- the students will be hearing what they need to do to plan out their writing using the TREE strategy.

Language Function students will develop. Additional language demands and language supports:

- Language Function - Creating: using the graphic organizer, the students are planning out their paragraph. They are preparing themselves for the composing stage of writing.
- Key Vocabulary- topic sentence, reasons, evaluate
- Discourse- students will be working together to discuss their ideas and fill out their graphic organizers.

Type of Student Assessments and what is being assessed:

- **Informal Assessment:** As the teacher is modeling the TREE strategy and working the lesson from focused instruction to independent learning, the teacher will make sure that the students understand the strategy that they are supposed to use and what kind of topics they can use. Any misunderstandings will be taken care of as the lesson is worked through. The teacher will be circulating the room to make sure that the students are on the right track and will see what kinds of topics they are choosing for their opinion writing.
- **Formal Assessment:** The students' graphic organizers will be collected to check for completion and to make sure valid information has been placed in the graphic organizer. They will also be looked over to check the students' understanding of the TREE strategy for planning our writing.
- **Modifications to the Assessments:** Students who need more assistance with planning their essay can receive help from a peer or adult to discuss and fill out their graphic organizer. They can take turns writing information on the graphic organizer. In addition to the graphic organizer, some students may have a teacher-student conference so the student has an opportunity to orally communicate their ideas to the teacher.

Evaluation Criteria: see attached rubric (Appendix D)

Relevant theories and/or research best practices:

- The gradual release of responsibility model works to slowly shift the lesson from teacher control to student control. As the lesson progresses, the students become more and more responsible for their own learning (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983).
- Collaborative learning allows students to express their understanding of a topic and allows them to discuss what they have learned. This helps the students feel more knowledgeable in what they have learned and helps validate their understanding of the material (Fisher & Frey, 2014).
- Modeling is an important part of the lesson that helps students understand the process they need to go through. It provides them with a strategy to help get them through the process and enables them to be more successful in completing their work (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009).
- Learning is a social activity and students need to be mentally engaged in order to learn; they need to be social and interact with others to learn (Bodrova & Leong, 2007).
- Students with learning disabilities often lack the understanding of strategies that will help them with an academic task. Students with learning disabilities need to learn different strategies to help them become better writers (Reid, et al., 2013).

Lesson Timeline:

Time (in minutes)	Activity
0:00 - 5:00	The teacher will explain what the students are going to be doing. They are going to be writing an opinion paragraph on a topic of their choice, where they will need at least five supporting details.
5:00 - 20:00	This will be the focused instruction part of the lesson. The teacher will introduce the TREE strategy (Graham & Harris, 2005) for planning opinion pieces. They will explain the mnemonic (Topic sentence, Reasons, Evaluate, Ending) and show the students how they can use this strategy to plan out their writing. The teacher will explain the different steps and show the students how to use the graphic organizer, which is Appendix B.
20:00 - 40:00	This will be the guided instruction part of the lesson. The students and the teacher will work together to create a class example for the graphic organizer. The teacher will show them the list of ideas so they understand what kinds of topics they can use. They will pick a topic for the class and brainstorm reasons for the opinion chosen. Then, they will work together to fill out the graphic organizer, with the teacher walking them through the process. Once they finish this, the students will brainstorm ideas that could be used for their own opinion pieces and they can add that to the class list (Appendix A).
40:00 - 50:00	This will be the collaborative learning part of the lesson. The students will break into small groups of 2 or 3 to discuss their ideas for their opinion piece. The students will talk about their topic and reasons that they might want to use to support their topic.
50:00 - 60:00	This will be the independent learning part of the lesson. The students will work on their own to fill out the graphic organizer and plan their opinion paragraph. The students will hand in their graphic organizer at the end of the lesson.

Lesson Plan 2

Grade Level: 3

Subject / Content area: Writing

Unit of Study: Opinion Paragraph

Lesson Title: Composing our Opinion Paragraph

Central Focus for the learning segment:

Given a choice of topic, the students will have opportunities to plan, compose, and revise an opinion paragraph (of 7 sentences) on a topic, supporting their statement with at least 5 details.

Content Standard(s):

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.1- Write opinion pieces on topics, supporting a point of view with reasons.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.1.A – Introduce the topic or text that they are writing about, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure that lists reasons.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.1.B – Provide reasons that support the opinion.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.1.C – Use linking words and phrases (e.g., because, therefore, since, for example) to connect opinion and reasons.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.1.D – Provide a concluding statement.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.4 - With guidance and support from adults, produce writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task and purpose.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.10 - Write routinely over shorter time frames: a single sitting.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.1 - Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.2.A - Capitalize appropriate words in titles.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.3.A - Choose words and phrases for effect.

CCS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4 - Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Learning Objectives associated with the content standards:

1. Using the graphic organizer from lesson 1 and a mentor text, the students will have opportunities to compose their opinion paragraph (of 7 sentences) on a topic, including a title, topic sentence, 5 supporting details, and a concluding sentence.

Instructional Resources and Materials to engage students in learning:

- Pencils
- Writing paper
- Smart Board for Mentor Text Opinion example
<http://www.thewritesource.com/studentmodels/wot-cloth.htm>
- Smart Board or Chart Paper
- TREE Graphic Organizers (class example and each of the students)
- Laptops for students (only if necessary)

Instructional Strategies and Learning Tasks that support diverse student needs. (Include what you and students will be doing.):

Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (Fisher & Frey, 2014; Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009)

Instructional Strategy	Learning Task
Focused Instruction	The teacher will explain what a mentor text and how they can be used when composing writing pieces. The teacher will show them the different features that can be looked for in a mentor text. The mentor text would be shown and discussed in this stage.
Guided Instruction	As a class, an opinion piece will be composed. The teacher and students will work together to write out the opinion piece using the mentor text and making sure to include the information from the graphic organizer they filled out in lesson 1, which includes a title, topic sentence, reasons, and an ending.
Collaborative Learning	The students will work together to discuss their ideas for their opinion pieces. They will look at their graphic organizers and see where they need to add information. They can discuss with their peers the details they need to include and what kinds of descriptors can be used to help get their point across. The students can also talk about the best way to start off their paragraph. The teacher will be monitoring the students and making sure they are staying on track and talking about their writing.
Independent Learning	The students will work on their own to compose their writing piece using the mentor text. The teacher will be monitoring the students and answering any questions they may have. The students will use the mentor text and the class example as guides to their opinion pieces.

Differentiation and planned universal supports:

- Visuals- students will have their graphic organizers, a mentor text example, and the class example to look at while composing their piece.
- Modeling- the teacher will be modeling the process of using a mentor text and composing an opinion piece.
- Audio- the students will be read the mentor text and will be hearing the process of composing their piece.
- Collaborative learning will be beneficial for all students. They will be able to ask their peers questions about their writing to discuss and clarify their ideas.
- Students who are more challenged by handwriting may have the opportunity to use a laptop or computer to compose their piece.

Language Function students will develop. Additional language demands and language supports:

- Language Function – Creating: students are composing their opinion pieces.
- Key Vocabulary- topic sentence, reasons, evaluate, mentor text
- Discourse- students will be working together to discuss their ideas and ask questions about parts of their writing.

Type of Student Assessments and what is being assessed:

- **Informal Assessment:** As the teacher is modeling the strategy of using a mentor text and working the lesson from focused instruction to independent learning, the teacher will make sure that the students know how to use a mentor text while they are writing. The teacher will be monitoring the students and making sure that any misconceptions are corrected along the way.

- **Formal Assessment:** The students’ writing pieces will be collected at the end of the lesson. The teacher will check to make sure that the students have included the correct information in their writing. The teacher will also be having the students write a quick sentence or 2 at the end of the lesson explaining how the mentor text(s) helped them in their writing and what features of the mentor text they tried to use.
- **Modifications to the Assessments:** Students who need more assistance with writing their essay can receive help from a peer or adult to discuss and write their paragraph. They can take turns writing sentences of the opinion paragraph. If they need to, students can use a computer/laptop if a peer or adult isn’t available to assist with writing. In addition to composing the writing piece, some students may have a teacher-student conference so the student has an opportunity to orally communicate their ideas to the teacher.

Evaluation Criteria: see attached rubric (Appendix D)

Relevant theories and/or research best practices:

- The gradual release of responsibility model works to slowly shift the lesson from teacher control to student control. As the lesson progresses, the students become more and more responsible for their own learning (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983).
- Collaborative learning allows students to express their understanding of a topic and allows them to discuss what they have learned. This helps the students feel more knowledgeable in what they have learned and helps validate their understanding of the material (Fisher & Frey, 2014).
- Modeling is an important part of the lesson that helps students understand the process they need to go through. It provides them with a strategy to help get them through the process and enables them to be more successful in completing their work (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009).
- Learning is a social activity and students need to be mentally engaged in order to learn; they need to be social and interact with others to learn (Bodrova & Leong, 2007).
- Students with learning disabilities often lack the understanding of strategies that will help them with an academic task. Students with learning disabilities need to learn different strategies to help them become better writers (Reid, et al., 2013).

Lesson Timeline:

Time (in minutes)	Activity
0:00 – 5:00	The teacher will recap lesson 1 and explain what they will be doing today. The students are going to be composing their opinion piece using a mentor text and the graphic organizer from lesson 1.
5:00 – 15:00	This will be the focused instruction part of the lesson. The teacher will introduce mentor texts and explain what they are and how they can be used (Morrow, 2012; Paquette, 2007; Gallagher, 2013, Reid, et al., 2013). Then, the teacher will show the students the mentor text on the Smart Board. The teacher will lead a discussion showing and asking the students about the different parts of an opinion piece: the title, the topic sentence, supporting details, and an ending. The teacher will also point out the introduction that was used for the mentor text that helped draw in the readers.
15:00 – 30:00	This will be the guided instruction part of the piece. The students and teacher will work together to compose an opinion piece, based on the topic they chose for the class example in lesson 1. The teacher will show them

	how to use their graphic organizer and the mentor text to assist the students with their writing.
30:00 – 35:00	This is the collaborative learning part of the lesson. The students will have opportunities to work with a peer to discuss last minute ideas and how they can use the mentor text to help with their writing. They will discuss a feature of the mentor text that they would like to try to incorporate into their writing. They can also discuss what describing words they can use in their writing to make it more exciting.
35:00 – 55:00	This will be the independent learning part of the lesson. The students will work on their own to compose their opinion piece. The students will hand this in at the end of the lesson.
55:00 – 60:00	The students will be asked to write a sentence or 2 on what features of the mentor text they looked at and how they used it in their writing.

Lesson Plan 3

Grade Level: 3

Subject / Content area: Writing

Unit of Study: Opinion Paragraph

Lesson Title: Revising our Opinion Paragraph

<p>Central Focus for the learning segment: Given a choice of topic, the students will have opportunities to plan, compose, and revise an opinion paragraph (of 7 sentences) on a topic, supporting their statement with at least 5 details.</p>					
<p>Content Standard(s): CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.1- Write opinion pieces on topics, supporting a point of view with reasons. CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.5 - With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing. CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.1 - Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing. CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.2.G - Consult reference materials, including beginning dictionaries, as needed to check and correct spellings. CCS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4 - Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. CCS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.5 - Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.</p>					
<p>Learning Objectives associated with the content standards:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Using the CDO strategy from Graham (1997), the students will have opportunities to revise and edit their opinion paragraph (of 7 sentences), using all 3 steps of the process, compare, diagnose, and operate. 					
<p>Instructional Resources and Materials to engage students in learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opinion paragraphs written in lesson 2 (class example and individual student’s writing) • Pencil (maybe colored pens or pencils if the students are going to be editing and revising right on their opinion piece) • CDO evaluation cards (Appendix C) • Writing paper 					
<p>Instructional Strategies and Learning Tasks that support diverse student needs. (Include what you and students will be doing.):</p> <p>Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (Fisher & Frey, 2014; Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009)</p>					
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="padding: 5px;">Instructional Strategy</th> <th style="padding: 5px;">Learning Task</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Focused Instruction</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">The teacher will explain the CDO strategy from Graham (1997) and how it can be used to revise paragraphs. The teacher will explain the different steps and how the students will use the CDO evaluation cards to evaluate and revise their paragraph.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Instructional Strategy	Learning Task	Focused Instruction	The teacher will explain the CDO strategy from Graham (1997) and how it can be used to revise paragraphs. The teacher will explain the different steps and how the students will use the CDO evaluation cards to evaluate and revise their paragraph.	
Instructional Strategy	Learning Task				
Focused Instruction	The teacher will explain the CDO strategy from Graham (1997) and how it can be used to revise paragraphs. The teacher will explain the different steps and how the students will use the CDO evaluation cards to evaluate and revise their paragraph.				

Guided Instruction	The class will work together to revise the class example paragraph from lesson 2. They will use the CDO evaluation cards to work through the paragraph sentence by sentence. The teacher will walk them through the CDO process and how to choose which evaluation card should be chosen for each step.
Collaborative Learning	After the students work on their own to revise their paragraphs, they will be working with a partner to discuss the changes that they made to their paragraph and why they made them. The teacher will be walking around to different groups and listening in to the conversations of the students.
Independent Learning	The students will work on their own to revise their paragraph. They will work through the CDO revision process on their own to work more in depth with their own paragraph. This will help students see the benefits in revision. They will make the appropriate changes to their paragraph and write a second draft of the paragraph. The teacher will be monitoring the students and making sure they understand the CDO process. Any students who need assistance will be helped by the teacher.

Differentiation and planned universal supports:

- Collaborative learning will be beneficial for all students. They will be able to discuss the changes they made to their paragraph with a peer, which will help students with their understanding of the CDO revision strategy and the writing process.
- Visuals- the students will have the CDO evaluation cards to help assist them with the revision process. Their opinion paragraphs and the class example will also be there for the students to look at.
- Modeling- the teacher will be modeling the CDO revision process before the students are required to use it.
- Audio- the students will be hearing the process they need to go through in order to revise their opinion paragraph.
- The CDO evaluation cards will be beneficial for tactile learners. It gives them an opportunity to work hands-on with the revising process.

Language Function students will develop. Additional language demands and language supports:

- Language Function – Creating: students are composing their opinion pieces.
- Key Vocabulary- evaluate, diagnose, operate
- Discourse- students will be discussing the revisions that they made to their paragraphs after going through the CDO revision process.

Type of Student Assessments and what is being assessed:

- **Informal Assessment:** As the teacher is modeling the CDO revision strategy and working the lesson from focused instruction to independent learning, the teacher will make sure the students understand the strategy they are supposed to use and how they can use it to revise their work. Any misunderstandings will be taken care of as the lesson progresses. The teacher will be monitoring the students to make sure they are using the CDO strategy in the correct way.

- **Formal Assessment:** The students’ writing will be collected. On the first draft of their opinion piece, the students will mark where they want to make changes and they will label each sentence of their paragraph with the card that they are going to be applying to their work. This will help them keep track of the changes they are making and will allow the teacher to see the process that the students are going through as they revise their writing. This will show whether or not they understand the CDO process.
- **Modifications to the Assessments:** Students who need more assistance with revising their work can receive assistance from a peer or adult to work through the CDO process and rewriting their paragraph. Also, if a student wrote their paragraph on the computer or laptop, the students can rewrite their paragraph on the computer. They should print out their first draft and show the revisions that they are making before typing their second draft. Students may also take turns with a peer or adult to write their revised paragraph. In addition to revising their piece, some students may have a teacher-student conference so the student has an opportunity to orally communicate their ideas to the teacher.

Evaluation Criteria: see attached rubric (Appendix D)

Relevant theories and/or research best practices:

- The gradual release of responsibility model works to slowly shift the lesson from teacher control to student control. As the lesson progresses, the students become more and more responsible for their own learning (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983).
- Collaborative learning allows students to express their understanding of a topic and allows them to discuss what they have learned. This helps the students feel more knowledgeable in what they have learned and helps validate their understanding of the material (Fisher & Frey, 2014).
- Modeling is an important part of the lesson that helps students understand the process they need to go through. It provides them with a strategy to help get them through the process and enables them to be more successful in completing their work (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009).
- Learning is a social activity and students need to be mentally engaged in order to learn; they need to be social and interact with others to learn (Bodrova & Leong, 2007).
- Students with learning disabilities often lack the understanding of strategies that will help them with an academic task. Students with learning disabilities need to learn different strategies to help them become better writers (Reid, et al., 2013).

Lesson Timeline:

Time (in minutes)	Activity
0:00 – 5:00	The teacher will recap the writing process that the students have been through so far, the planning and composing stages. Now they are going to be revising their work using the CDO strategy from Graham (1997).
5:00 – 15:00	This will be the focused instruction part of the lesson. The teacher will explain the CDO revision strategy from Graham (1997) and the meaning of the mnemonic (Compare, Diagnose, Operate). Compare tells the student to read over their sentence. Diagnose tells the student to determine what they need to do with that sentence. Operate tells the students the operation they need to perform to complete the revision of each sentence. There are CDO evaluation cards to help the students work through the processes of Diagnose and Operate, which are attached as Appendix C.

15:00 – 30:00	This will be the guided instruction part of the lesson. The students and the teacher will work together to revise the class opinion paragraph. The teacher will show them the CDO evaluation cards that they need to use to revise their piece. They will work through each step of the CDO process as a class. They will read the sentence first (Compare). Then they will determine what they should do with the sentence using the diagnose evaluation cards (Diagnose). Then they determine what they need to do to make the revision using the operate evaluation cards (Operate).
30:00 – 50:00	This will be the independent learning part of the lesson. The students will work on their own to revise their paragraph using the CDO revision strategy. They will use the CDO evaluation cards to work through their piece and they will also record the changes they are going to make on their first draft. Then, they will write a second draft of their paragraph, making the appropriate changes.
50:00 – 60:00	This is the collaborative learning part of the lesson. The students will break into pairs and discuss the changes that they made to their opinion paragraphs. This will allow the students to discuss the revision process that they went through and they will be able to show their final product to their partner. They will hand in their first draft with the record of their revision process along with their rewritten paragraph.

Chapter 5: Rationale / Impact on Learning

This chapter provided my reflection about planning this opinion writing learning segment. In this chapter, the edTPA commentary template was used to guide my reflection. To reflect using the edTPA requirement, the following sections of the edTPA commentary used Arial 11 point font and single-spaced format. There were five sections that made up my reflection. Section one discussed the central focus of the lesson and why the lesson was important. Section two discussed the knowledge I had to plan the lesson. This asked me to think about the students' prior knowledge and their strengths and needs. Section three asked me to discuss the support I planned to provide to my students' literacy learning. I discussed what materials, the instructional strategies and supports I planned to support my students' learning. Section four made me determine the level of thinking that the students were to be engaged in. I also explained the key vocabulary and activities planned being used to support and engage in this level of thinking. I also discussed the supports and learning tasks in place to help the students reach that level of thinking. Section five talked about the assessments in place, both formal and informal. This section explained how I planned to monitor student learning and how it was planned to be used to show me each student's understanding of the material. The commentary was my reflection about planning the learning segment.

By presenting the rationale section in the Elementary edTPA commentary template, chapter five aimed to make the connection between the two. It also acknowledged the importance of research, or evidence-base, through the planning and reflecting process.

TASK 1: PLANNING COMMENTARY

Respond to the prompts below (**no more than 9 single-spaced pages, including prompts**) by typing your responses within the brackets. Do not delete or alter the prompts. Pages exceeding the maximum will not be scored.

1. Central Focus

- a. Describe the central focus and purpose for the content you will teach in the learning segment.

[The central focus and purpose for this learning segment is to teach students strategies for writing. They will learn strategies to assist them in different stages of writing, including planning, composing, and revising. The students will learn strategies different strategies to assist them with their writing, including the TREE strategy from Graham and Harris (2005), mentor texts, discussed by Morrow (2012); Paquette (2007); Gallagher (2013); Reid, et al. (2013), and the CDO revision strategy introduced by Graham (1997). These strategies will aid students in the writing process as they plan, compose, and revise and opinion paragraph (of 7 sentences) on a topic of their choice, supporting their statement with at least 5 details.]

- b. Given the central focus, describe how the standards and learning objectives within your learning segment address
- an essential literacy strategy
 - requisite skills that support use of the strategy
 - reading/writing connections

[With the central focus in mind, the learning segment is targeting many different literacy standards. Writing is an essential part of literacy. Students need to learn how to effectively communicate their ideas with others through their writing. The strategies that the students are learning will help them learn how to effectively plan, compose, and revise their work. They will be working to meet many different standards, but there are a few that are the most relevant to all three lessons. These would include CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.1- Write opinion pieces on topics, supporting a point of view with reasons, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience, and CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.5- Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach. Students will be working to address these standards and many others as they work through the writing process with their opinion paragraph. They will also be working on many different skills, such as word choice and appropriate use of grammar and punctuation. These are skills that they will need for any writing piece that they will do. Students need to understand the writing process and the different stages of writing that there are. This will help them become more effective writers and will enable them to develop a deeper understanding of the writing process.]

- c. Explain how your plans build on each other to help students **make connections** between skills and the essential strategy to comprehend **OR** compose text in meaningful contexts.

[Each of my lessons work off of each other and work to build up the writing process. First, we start with planning. This allows the students to really think about their writing and what they would like to inform their readers about. Planning gives the students opportunities to really design their writing and allows them to think about what they need to include in their writing. Then, they get to see the effects that planning has on their writing. In lesson 2, the students are working to compose their own paragraph, using a mentor text and their graphic organizer that they used to plan out their paragraph. This allows students to see the benefits of planning out

their writing prior to composing their piece. Then, in lesson 3, the students are revising their piece. With all of these steps, the students are able to see the writing process and the different steps they should take while writing. They are able to see each part of planning, composing, and revising can make the connections among the steps through the three lessons. They are able to see how their work is a continuous process that keeps building. Being able to understand these processes of writing allows the students to be able to compose a text in a meaningful way that is beneficial for the students.]

2. Knowledge of Students to Inform Teaching

For each of the prompts below (2a–b), describe what you know about **your** students **with respect to the central focus** of the learning segment.

Consider the variety of learners in your class who may require different strategies/support (e.g., students with IEPs or 504 plans, English language learners, struggling readers, underperforming students or those with gaps in academic knowledge, and/or gifted students).

- a. Prior academic learning and prerequisite skills related to the central focus—**Cite evidence of what students know, what they can do, and what they are still learning to do.**

[Students are still developing their understanding of the writing process. The students understand what writing is and what they need to do, but they are still learning about the process that they should be going through as they are writing. They know how to write and are working on developing their skills to effectively communicate via writing. The students are still learning techniques and styles of writing and are also in need of learning different strategies to help them become more effective writers. At this point, the students are working just to get information down on the paper to say that their writing is done. They don't take the time to think about their writing and the process they are going through. Students with learning disabilities often need more practice with writing than their peers and they need to learn strategies to help make writing easier for them.]

- b. Personal/cultural/community assets related to the central focus—**What do you know about your students' everyday experiences, cultural backgrounds and practices, and interests?**

[Students with learning disabilities are challenged by writing. These students need extra support with their writing. They struggle to use the appropriate strategies when they are writing. They also struggle to write legibly and often produce writing that is unclear and hard to understand. These students don't understand what good writing is and struggle to produce writing that effectively communicates their ideas. They tend to focus on the mechanics of the writing and what it looks like rather than focusing on the content and the message they are communicating. These students really struggle with writing and would rather avoid the process all together. Teaching these students strategies for writing and showing them the whole process of writing will help them become more effective writers. They need to understand the planning, composing, and revising process and it is important for them to know strategies to be successful in each of these stages of writing. These strategies will also be beneficial for other students. Learning these strategies and becoming more familiar with the stages of the writing process will be beneficial for all students. It will help students become more effective writers, which is a life skill that all people need. This will help the students become more interested in writing as well. In this learning segment, students are able to write their paragraph on a topic of their choice. This helps the students be more engaged in their writing and allows writing to be a more enjoyable activity.]

3. Supporting Students' Literacy Learning

Respond to prompts 3a–c below. To support your justifications, refer to the instructional materials and lesson plans you have included as part of Task 1. In addition, **use principles from research and/or theory to support your explanations.**

- a. Justify how your understanding of your students' prior academic learning and personal/cultural/community assets (from prompts 2a–b above) guided your choice or adaptation of learning tasks and materials. Be explicit about the connections between the learning tasks and students' prior academic learning, assets, and research/theory.

[Knowing my students, I chose to teach them strategies for the different stages of writing. Reid, et al. (2013) points out that students with learning disabilities don't use the strategies they need in order to be successful writers. Teaching the students strategies, such as TREE, mentor texts, and CDO, students are able to see strategies that they can use while they are in each stage of writing. Reid, et al. (2013) also explains that students often skip the planning stage all together. They just want to jump right in and get their writing done. They don't want to take the time to actually think about what they are going to be writing. Teaching them the TREE strategy will prevent the students from skipping the planning stage and will allow them to see a strategy that will show them how they can plan out their writing and how it will benefit them. Students often want to skip the revision stage of writing as well. They have already completed the writing tasks and don't want to go back and work on their piece more. Wong (2000) shows us that students with learning disabilities often have more revisions that need to be done. So, teaching the students the CDO revision strategy will be beneficial. It will help them see the process they should go through as they revise their work and it is a strategy that can be applied to all of their writing tasks. Students with learning disabilities benefit from explicit or strategy instruction. Having direct and explicit instructions helps guide the students through the lesson. The form of instruction that this takes on is the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model, which is explained by Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2009), Koeing (2010), and Fisher and Frey (2014). This model of instruction works with students to move from focused instruction to independent learning. With this instructional method, students are told what they need to do, are shown how to do it, and then work with their peers to practice what they have learned. Then, the students work independently to show their understanding. This is a good model for my students. They need to be shown these strategies and learn how to use them in order for them to learn them and practice them. Beginning the lesson with modeling and working towards independent learning is beneficial for the students. It lets them see what is expected of them and shows them how to use the strategy prior to using it on their own. The slow progression helps the students learn the strategy and gives them the time and practice that they need to learn the material.]

- b. Describe and justify why your instructional strategies and planned supports are appropriate for **the whole class, individuals, and/or groups of students with specific learning needs.**

Consider students with IEPs or 504 plans, English language learners, struggling readers, underperforming students or those with gaps in academic knowledge, and/or gifted students.

[These strategies are beneficial for all students. When using the Gradual Release of Responsibility model, the lesson is student focused. The lesson moves at the pace of the students and works with the students' needs. There are multiple ways through with the material is being worked with, all of which are going to reach every student in some way. Also, all students are going to benefit from learning strategies for their writing. Students with learning disabilities are going to benefit from learning how to implement these strategies. They often

forget to use strategies for their writing. So, learning strategies for the different stages of writing will help them become more effective writers. Students who are more advanced can help their peers and enhance their knowledge of the material even more. They can also take a more independent track for the lesson. For example, there are graphic organizers that were made for the TREE strategy. But, students who are more advanced could create their own graphic organizer for their paragraph. The learning segment is designed to meet the needs of all students. The lessons will be guided by the students and their needs for each stage of the writing process.]

- c. Describe common developmental approximations or common misconceptions within your literacy central focus and how you will address them.

[Students with learning disabilities often believe that they just need to get something down on the paper to say that they did it. They don't think they need to take time on their writing and they don't see the importance of writing. Wong (2000) explains they also worry more about the appearance rather than the content of the writing. They think the appearance of the writing is more important than the content. It is important for the students to understand that writing is more than just getting words down on paper. Wong (2000) stresses the importance of students understanding the complex process of writing. This misconception will be addressed through the learning segment. The students will see the different stages of writing and will understand the importance of planning, composing, and revising their writing. Students also believe that writing is just something they need to do for school. But, it is a skill that students need to use for their entire life. They need to see the importance and using real world examples, such as opinion pieces, makes the school to world connection that the students need. Also, by letting them choose their own topics, they are able to write about something that is important to them and their own personal world. They will also be able to see the opinions of other students, all of which have real world connections in more areas than just writing. Himmele and Himmele (2011) point out the importance of engaging students. It is important to make connections to their lives and it is important to help the students take an interest in the material that they are learning.]

4. Supporting Literacy Development Through Language

- a. **Language Function.** Identify **one** language function essential for students to develop and practice the literacy strategy within your central focus. Listed below are some sample language functions. You may choose one of these or another more appropriate for your learning segment.

Analyze	Argue	Categorize	Compare/contrast	Describe	Explain
Interpret	Predict	Question	Retell	Summarize	

[The language function of this learning segment is: **Create**- the students are working to create a writing piece, while going through the planning, composing, and revising stages of writing.]

- b. Identify a key learning task from your plans that provides students with opportunities to practice using the language function in ways that support the essential strategy. Identify the lesson in which the learning task occurs. (Give lesson day/number.)

[One key learning task from my plans that provides students with opportunities to practice creating is in lesson 2. In this lesson, the students are composing a writing piece. In order for students to create this writing piece, they are using their graphic organizers from lesson one and a mentor text to aid in the composing process. In this lesson, the students are using the graphic organizer and a mentor text to compose an opinion paragraph of 7 sentences on a topic of their

choice, making sure to include a title, topic sentence, 5 supporting details, and a concluding sentence.]

c. **Additional Language Demands.** Given the language function and learning task identified above, describe the following associated language demands (written or oral) students need to understand and/or use:

- Vocabulary or key phrases
- **Plus** at least one of the following:
 - Syntax
 - Discourse

Consider the range of students' understandings of the language function and other language demands—what do students already know, what are they struggling with, and/or what is new to them?

[There are some **key vocabulary** that students should know. These would include topic sentence, reasons, evaluate, mentor text, diagnose, and operate. This vocabulary is important for students to know in order to fully understand the different strategies they are going to be using for writing in each of the lessons. The students will be working with syntax and discourse as well. **Syntax** within the lessons will be the structure of sentences and the students' performance regarding the syntax will be assessed using the rubric. **Discourse** within lessons will be the way students create and share knowledge. This will be assessed through observations. The students will be writing in all three lessons. They will be developing a graphic organizer, a written piece, and a revised piece. In each of the lessons, the students will also be working with their peers and the teacher to discuss their writing and the different stages of the writing process. The strategies that they are learning will be new to them, although the students will be familiar with writing and working with peers. These students who are struggling with syntax will use strategies, such as the TREE strategy, and will work with their peers to develop their understanding of the writing process.]

d. **Language Supports.** Refer to your lesson plans and instructional materials as needed in your response to the prompt.

- Describe the instructional supports (during and/or prior to the learning task) that help students understand and successfully use the language function and additional language demands identified in prompts 4a–c.

[In each lesson, the teacher will be using the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model from Fisher and Frey (2014) and Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2009). This model helps work the students through each process and allows them to see how to create a writing piece. They are able to really see each part of the process and are walked through the process so they can have a deeper understanding of the writing process. The Gradual Release of Responsibility Model has 4 steps of instruction that are used to help students learn. These include focused instruction, guided instruction, collaborative learning, and independent learning. These different types of instruction help the students understand different styles of learning and allow them to work with the material in different forms. Also, at the beginning of each lesson, the teacher recaps the prior lesson(s) and explains the next task at hand. The teacher also makes sure to explain the key vocabulary that they students will need for each strategy/lesson prior to using it so the students are able to understand the writing strategies that they are going to be learning for the lesson.]

5. Monitoring Student Learning

In response to the prompts below, refer to the assessments you will submit as part of the materials for Task 1.

- a. Describe how your planned formal and informal assessments will provide direct evidence that students can use the essential literacy strategy and requisite skills to comprehend or compose text **throughout** the learning segment.

[Throughout the learning segment, there are informal and formal assessments that occur in each lesson. The informal assessment consists of observation. In lesson 1, the informal assessment takes place throughout the lesson. In each part of the lesson, there is some way in which the teacher is assessing the students' understanding of the TREE strategy for planning writing pieces. When the class is working together, the teacher will be asking questions and checking for their understanding prior to sending them off on their own to work. Also, when the students are working with a partner or on their own, the teacher will be circulating to make sure the students are on track and understand the TREE strategy. For lesson 2, the informal assessment is very similar. The teacher will be monitoring the students and will be making sure that they understand how to use mentor texts to help them compose their writing pieces. The teacher will be asking questions during the demonstration. The teacher will also be monitoring the students and making sure that they are using the mentor text in an appropriate manner. Lesson 3 follows the same trend. The informal assessment consists of questioning during the demonstration and monitoring as the students practice the CDO strategy for revising their written pieces. These informal assessments provide the teacher with information about the students' understanding of the different strategies and give the teacher an opportunity to correct misunderstandings if the students aren't quite grasping how to use the strategy. This way, the teacher knows where the students are at. This gives the teacher the chance to adjust the lesson to the needs of the students as it progresses. The informal assessments are checking for the students' understanding throughout the lesson and allow the teacher to see where the students are at during different parts of the lesson. The formal assessments consist of a written product that is turned in. In lesson 1, the formal assessment is the graphic organizer. The graphic organizer is the final product which will show the students understanding of the TREE strategy for planning writing. It will also show if the students understand the different components of an opinion paragraph. In lesson 2, the formal assessment is the opinion paragraph. The students will be turning in their opinion paragraph which will show the teacher the students' understanding of an opinion paragraph and how the graphic organizer can act as an aid to their writing. The students' paragraphs will also show their understanding of using mentor texts. The students will also be able to show their understanding of mentor texts through a sticky note. The students will be handing in a sticky note with a sentence explaining how they used a mentor text in their writing. This will show the teacher the students' understanding of mentor texts and opinion writing. In lesson 3, the students will be documenting the revisions that they are making to their paragraph using the CDO strategy. The students will be marking up their first draft to show what changes they are making to their paragraph. Then, they will be writing a final draft of the paragraph incorporating the changes they decided to make, which they will be handing in as well. This will show the teacher the students' understanding of the CDO strategy and what it means to revise their writing. These formal assessments help the students work towards understanding the writing process. They are able to see the different steps of writing and they can see what kind of processes they should be going through when they are writing. The informal and formal assessments show the students' understanding of different processes of writing and how they all can be used to write an opinion paragraph.]

- b. Explain how the design or adaptation of your planned assessments allows students with specific needs to demonstrate their learning.

Consider all students, including students with IEPs or 504 plans, English language learners, struggling readers, underperforming students or those with gaps in academic knowledge, and/or gifted students.

[The assessments in each lesson offer some flexibility to adapt to different students' needs. In lesson 1, students who are more advanced are given the opportunity to create their own graphic organizer using the TREE strategy. Also, students who are more advanced can help a peer who needs additional support. They can work with a peer to discuss the TREE strategy and can take turns writing information on the graphic organizer with a student who may struggle with writing. In lesson 2, students who struggle with writing may also receive assistance with their writing. They can take turns writing with a more advanced peer or an adult. Some students may also have the opportunity to use a laptop to write their paragraph. In lesson 3, students may also work with a peer or adult to work through the CDO revision process. Just like in lesson 2, the students who used a laptop may use the laptop again to write their final draft. In all three lessons, the students who may struggle to communicate their ideas through writing, whether it be due to a language barrier or due to poor handwriting, etc., the students have an opportunity to have a teacher-student conference to discuss their ideas orally with the teacher. This way, the teacher can assess their writing, but will also have the oral communication that will allow the students to prove their understanding, whether or not they can clearly produce it in writing. These assessments allow all students different opportunities to showcase their understanding of the lesson. The students who are more advanced can make their understanding of the material more concrete by helping their peers who need additional support. The students who need additional support can further their understanding of the material with the help of their peers.]

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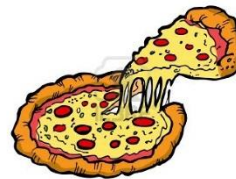
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IDEAS TO SPARK YOUR THINKING

Topic Ideas:

- ❖ Best pet to have at home
- ❖ Most fun game to play
- ❖ Best summer treat
- ❖ Best candy bar
- ❖ Best TV show
- ❖ Best movie
- ❖ Coolest animal at the zoo
- ❖ Best food ever
- ❖ Coolest ride at the fair
- ❖ Most delicious pizza toppings
- ❖ Most fun video game
- ❖ Best season
- ❖ What ideas do you have?



Title:

Appendix B

T

(Topic Sentence)

R

(Reasons or support for your statement)

E

(Evaluate your reasons)

Reasons:

1. Yes or No
2. Yes or No
3. Yes or No
4. Yes or No
5. Yes or No

Are my reasons believable? If not, go back and re-work them.

E

(Ending)

Appendix C

CDO Evaluation Cards

Diagnose

D1-This might not be useful to my paragraph.	D3-This doesn't sound right.	D5-People might not understand this part.
D2-This is good.	D4-This isn't what I meant to say.	D6-People won't be interested in this part.

Operate

O1-Rewrite	O2-Add more
O3-Leave this part out	O4-Change the wording

Appendix D

Student:

Opinion Paragraph Title:

	Part 1 – Planning	Part 2 – Composing	Part 3 - Revising
2	The student has filled out the graphic organizer completely. This includes a title, a topic sentence, 5 supporting details, evaluation of the reasons, and a concluding sentence. All steps of the TREE strategy need to be seen.	The student has written the paragraph with all the required components: title, topic sentence, 5 supporting reasons, and an ending. There is use of descriptive vocabulary. The student should have mostly correct grammar and punctuation.	The student went through all the steps of the CDO process and appropriately documented that on their first draft. The final paragraph still has all the required components: title, topic sentence, 5 supporting reasons, and an ending.
1	Some parts of the TREE strategy may be missing and an incomplete graphic organizer is turned in.	Some parts of the paragraph may be missing. The grammar and punctuation has many errors.	The student didn't go through all the steps of the CDO paragraph or failed to label the cards being used for each revision. It is unclear of which revisions were made.
0	The student fails to turn in a graphic organizer or fails to fill out the graphic organizer with serious information.	The student fails to write a paragraph.	The student fails to use the CDO strategy or makes no changes to their paragraph.

Score: /6

Comments: