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The Effectiveness of a Special Education Teacher on Meeting the Needs of Students with Disabilities and Meeting the Common Core State Standards: A Self-Study

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Running head: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER ON
MEETING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND
MEETING THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS: A SELF-STUDY

The Effectiveness of a Special Education Teacher
on Meeting the Needs of Students with Disabilities
and Meeting the Common Core State Standards: A Self-study

By

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A Capstone Project submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development
of The College at Brockport, State University of New York

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The recent shift in education has challenged teachers, veteran teachers and new teachers to keep up with the most recent research of instructional practices. Teachers are now given more responsibility, such as differentiating all materials, lesson planning, using Common Core Learning Standards, instruction for teaching rigorous academic tasks, and effecting the most productivity. The recent implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards in New York State was sudden. The Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) are a set of standards that are designed to challenge students and to prepare students to be career and college ready. The CCLS were implemented because students leaving high school seemed unprepared for the next step of life, whether that be going to college or entering a job (www.engageny.org).

Problem Statement

Students with disabilities need a more modified pace, scaffolding of material, and visual and sensory aids to support the material which they are exposed to (Fraser, 2013 p.12). The Common Core does not support these needs and is still mandating that all students fulfill the same requirements according to their grade level. Students in special education settings throughout the duration of the school day are required to complete the same rigorous assignments as those students in a general education setting. The CCLS do not supplement any teachings or suggest differentiation of any academic tasks (www.engageny.org). Students with disabilities are most likely one-to-two grade levels below and are still faced with the same challenges of those students on grade level.

Significance of Problem

The problem professional staff faces are how to teach the material to students with disabilities while still meeting their needs. An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) has been

created for students who have disabilities. An IEP is a legal document that states information on each student's strengths, weaknesses, social/emotional needs and goals, academic needs and goals, and management needs. All staff members who interact with students with this documentation have signed off on reading the IEP and abiding by it. That means that each teacher, paraprofessional, P.E. teacher, etc., will make adjustments to their teachings to meet the needs of these students in hopes of making their education bearable, manageable. These adjustments allow the students to learn in an environment that is safe and encouraging, helping the students to achieve their goals.

The CCLS do not take students with disabilities into account or that a teacher must follow the needs of the students that are documented on the IEP. Considering there is not a specific curriculum or standards for teaching students with disabilities, the teacher is the primary individual who must take the CCLS, the district-wide curriculum, mandated assessments, and the needs of the students and compile a repertoire of instructional practices to include all the components to execute her teaching. With the CCLS being recently introduced, there is limited research on how special education teachers are handling all of these requirements or on results of their students' success in the classroom.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this self-study research was to assess myself as a special education teacher in a self-contained 15:1 setting. The CCLS have identified that these standards do not support students who have special needs, creating questions around the expectation that CCLS must be used in every classroom, including those that are made up of diverse learning profiles. I believe every educator has the capability to teach to his or her students' needs, no matter the requirement, if the time and effort are put forth. This study measured the amount of

time and effort I put into teaching my students grade-level material while differentiating to meet their instructional levels, using the CCLS as a guide. With that in mind, the research questions I have set for myself were:

1. Am I meeting the needs of my students in 4th and 5th grade according to CCLS, the district requirements, and their IEP requirements?
2. How am I supporting my students as the special education teacher, who is responsible for all students being exposed to grade-level material and allowing students to make gains academically?
3. As I monitor my own instructional practices, how am I monitoring those practices and how can I change my practices to be more effective in the classroom?

Study Approach

In order to obtain answers to those questions, I collected data in different ways. As part of the newly implemented Common Core, teachers must face many evaluations as part of the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) (engageny.org). I analyzed formal observations that were conducted by administrators to determine whether my teaching practices are effective. Also, I reflected on my own teaching. After teaching a lesson, I reflected on whether I met my objectives, what I thought went well, and where I could show growth for the next lesson. Lastly, I collected data on professional development sessions that I attended and the information I obtained while in attendance. All of this data helped me to evaluate the opportunity for success in my classroom for all of my students while meeting the requirements set for me by the State, by the district, and from legal documents.

Rationale

In my position as a 15:1 special education teacher for 4th and 5th grade students, planning is necessary and intense. A special education position requires every instructional practice be used with the CCLS when teaching the curriculum given by the district and meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Due to the recent implementation of the Common Core, there is not information on CCLS and the effect it has on special education or on special education teachers (Graham & Harries, 2013). I believe that education teachers have a greater challenge because now, as part of their APPR, their positions could be at stake depending on the growth of students. I believe the students' growth doesn't necessarily begin with the students; it begins with the teacher and how that teacher is presenting the information, and whether or not the instructional practices are effective. As a result of believing that the onus is on the teacher rather than the students, I have come to a decision that this self-study will be looking at the teaching methods and instructional practices I use within my own classroom.

Definition of Terms

The terms used in this research is educationally based. The term APPR refers to the annual professional performance review, which is a year-long evaluation process that includes goal setting, formal observations in the classroom, unannounced observation, evidence of teaching, and students' results of the state assessments: English Language Arts and Math. Every general education and special education teacher is required to participate in APPR evaluation. The evaluation is conducted by administrators within the school district. Prior to the school year ending, teachers will meet individually with their administrators and receive a score solely based on the teacher's efforts. Once the students' test results are distributed to the public, then the final

score will be calculated to decipher whether a teacher is highly effective, effective, developing, or ineffective.

An Individualized Educational Plan is referred to as an IEP. All students who are classified with a learning disability in public school district have an IEP. An IEP is a legal document where service providers, or any individuals who work with students with disabilities, are able to look for information on those students and how the students learn best. There are goals set for the students based on their needs, which are evaluated three times a year by the service providers. Once a year, a committee comes together to meet regarding each classified student. The committee includes parents, general education teacher, special education teacher, school psychologist, building administrator, Speech provider, O.T./ P.T. provider, administrator, and anyone else who works with the students with disabilities on a regular basis.

A self-contained classroom is a room that caters to students who have more needs and struggles than those students in a general education classroom. A 15:1 self-contained classroom is a program designed for students with disabilities who need a more restrictive environment. The primary teacher in a self-contained classroom is a special education teacher. There is a paraprofessional who also works in the classroom to support students and enhance the teacher's instruction. Students in a self-contained 15:1 classroom are students who have one disability and need more support and interventions academically. Students in a 15:1 classroom are still eligible to graduate with a regents diploma and are expected to complete the same grade level material as other students in that grade level who are in general education. The class size never exceeds more than fifteen students at a time and generally has an average of 8-10 students in the classroom (Causton-Theorharis, Theohair, Orsati & Cosier, 2011).

Summary

This self-study was conducted to assess my instructional practices in a special education 15:1 setting and how I can develop as a teacher to fit the needs of my students using CCLS and district required curriculum. Since the Common Core does not have information on differentiation or how to support students with disabilities, I conducted my own research on my own teachings to see if I am effective in teaching students with disabilities.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In order to conduct my research, I explored special education and the different positions, what effective teaching looks like, and instructional practices. The first investigation looked closely at special education teachers and what their responsibilities entail prior to getting results from students. Special education teachers are given material that they must teach, and the data that was collected contains specific practices that I will then implement in my own teaching. I used the instructional practices that research has found successful and adapt them to my own teaching style.

Special Education Teachers

Students with disabilities receive services provided by different special education teachers to meet their needs. A teacher who is a case manager for a student with disability is responsible to meet the student's needs, evaluate the student's progress and goals, and present the student with grade level material. "Special education teachers will need to develop a thorough understanding of the K-5 CCLS in order to facilitate access for students with disabilities within general education classroom, to assist classroom teachers in making appropriate adaptations and accommodations, and to design interventions that best prepare students to achieve competency across a wide range of literacy skills"(Haager & Vaughn, 2013, p.8). In order to meet students' needs, special education teachers must develop an understanding of expectations and curriculum for the grade level in order to determine adjustments that need to be made for students with disabilities, collaborate with the general education teacher as well as any members of the students' educational team (speech, O.T./P.T.), and have a systematic approach of instruction including an objective, modeling, scaffolding, independent practice, and formative/summative assessment (Haagar & Vaughn).

Effective Teaching

“Teaching and learning are valued but complex processes that become very challenging when the amount of content to be covered is large, allocated instruction time is limited and learner’s abilities are diverse “(Elliott, Roach, & Kurz, 2014, p.87). Special education teachers are required to use the CCLS just as general education teachers. With that said, special education teachers must not only teach to the CCLS, they also must teach to their district curriculum and requirements while meeting the needs of students who they are responsible for. In the study conducted by Elliott, et al (2014), the participants included 36 special education teachers who were monitored and analyzed on what their duties include. It was found that 15% of time was used for professional development and 15% of time was used for paperwork. These results indicate that more than a quarter of a special education teacher’s position is not directed towards students in isolation, which has a great negative impact on teaching practices (Elliott, et al.). This indicates that teachers are working more on indirect components of their position rather than their direct focus, which is to teach students in an effective manner. The participants in this research were required to log different components of lessons and teachings daily. All of the 36 special education teachers kept a log on a computer which recorded the instructional time allotted for the lesson, the content covered that is part of the curriculum, and the instructional practice that was used. The data was collected on a computer program that was then designed as a portfolio where professionals could find which instructional practices were found to be effective and which had a positive influence on students’ achievement (Elliott, et al). This research, designed collectively, used three assessment tools, which included a guidance system on instructional learning opportunities, instructional observation system, and instructional

growth plan. All included details, feedback and measured changes in instructional actions to provide special education teachers a personalized and data rich evaluation tool (Elliott, et al).

This study also found that the quantity of instruction was related to students' achievement; the more time spent on explicit instruction, the higher the achievement. This explicit instruction included academic instruction in a less restrictive environment and individualized instruction (Elliott, et al). A less restrictive setting refers to giving students with disabilities the same learning opportunities as those students without disabilities. As Elliott et al. (2014) continued to explain the study of special education teachers, they analyzed their instructional practices, "focus shifted to the implementation of evidence based instructional practices" offered the teachers in the study (Elliott, et al). Those instructional practices included a formula of strategy instruction and direct instruction. Under direct instruction, the special education teachers modeled effective instructional procedures that positively influenced academic performance. The evidence-based instructional practices included controlling task difficulty, conducting instruction in small interactive groups, and promoting "think alouds" (Elliott, et al).

The participants in the study used these evidence-based instructional practices on their students with disabilities ranging from first to sixth grades. All of the case-studies showed some type of growth or progression. By analyzing these results, the participants found that although instruction seemed to be driven by testing and teacher performance evaluations, the students will only show growth when teachers use evidence-based instructional practices. The participants logged their results/findings on the computer and calculated the amount of evidence-based instructional practices used in the classroom against other teacher practices and students' growth.

Although testing is something that cannot be changed or controlled, the instruction that takes place under the teacher has an effect on students' growth (Elliott, et. al).

Instructional Practices

I looked closely at the practices of different researchers. Those practices included specific instructional approaches, ideas on how to be prepared to teach students with disabilities, and also how to meet the CCLS.

Research by Haagar and Vaughn (2013) provided examples of instructional practices that have been proven effective. Those instructional practices they discussed included visual approaches, structured worktime, students with disabilities and their positive reactions to routines and procedures, use of hands-on manipulatives, and linking instruction to real life. Haager and Vaughn also focused on students' zone of proximal development and difficulties that students with disabilities encounter on a daily basis (Haagar & Vaughn).

Haagar and Vaughn also included instructional practices and their effectiveness. Modeling is an instructional practice that teachers tend to take for granted (2013). Modeling is a way for teachers to demonstrate their expectations and provide clarity for students. Modeling the directions and expectations is a visual approach to instruction that allows students to see what the task is rather than an auditory approach where they are just listening to the directions. Another instructional practice that Haagar and Vaughn emphasize is the use of scaffolded practice. When a lesson is scaffolded it means that the activity provides building blocks or different benchmarks that students achieve before moving up to a more difficult task. Scaffolding a lesson will give students opportunities to complete the task in a different way; however, the end result is the same, and every student will reach the end result whether they used a scaffolded practice or not (Haagar & Vaughn).

Haagar and Vaughn also included in their findings that students with disabilities need to be challenged with rigorous assignments just as any general education student would be (p.13). Students have a zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1987) and need to be challenged appropriately at their instructional level to the point that the task is difficult but not impossible or lends the students to become frustrated. Students with disabilities also need to have the opportunity to work independently (Fraser, 2013). Working independently is an extremely difficult task for students with disabilities. Some of the struggles include distractors, inability to communicate if they need help or specify where they need help, and students with disabilities tend not to be intrinsically motivated. Fraser lists five activities that students with disabilities can work on independently. Give students independent type level work during English Language Arts center time, create visual organizers of structured work systems, take advantage of hands-on manipulatives to enhance students' understanding, use crafts to help enhance instruction, and finally reference grocery store items for academic, daily living, and vocational skills. Combining these five tips together, the students are given many different opportunities to work successfully in a risk-free environment (Fraser).

Not only is the reading rigor that is aligned with the Common Core challenging for students with disabilities, the writing demands are also challenging. Graham and Harris (2013) researched students with a learning disability and how it affected their writing in comparison with CCLS for that appropriate grade level. Throughout the article, educators were reminded that, although CCLS were not designated or altered for students with disabilities, it is still the educator's responsibility to help the students reach a higher achievement than they have in the past. "We generally agree with this analysis and think that is important that we set high expectations for what students with a learning disability can achieve in writing" (Graham &

Harris). After the experiment and the data was collected, there were many recommendations on how to teach writing to students with disabilities successfully. The recommendations included teachers increasing their knowledge on the writing standards and writing development, create a writing environment where students can thrive, and employ evidence-based writing practices (Graham & Harris).

Professional Development

For those teachers who have the opportunity to attend professional development, they will have more exposure to best instructional practices, analyze and evaluate the CCLS, and differentiate their instruction to fit the needs of their students by collaborating with colleagues and peers (Graham & Harris, 2013). Once teachers are able to truly understand the CCLS and how to effectively implement them into their instructional practices, teachers must closely look at and examine the environment in which students are asked to work in. The environment for a writer must be peaceful and risk free where students can thrive. Students with disabilities may need soft music, dimmed light or bright lights, and the option to use head phones to detract noises. Once the environment is evaluated and students are comfortable, then and only then will significant writing take place (Graham & Harris).

Rigor of Common Core Learning Standards

The CCLS is implemented in English Language Arts and mathematics. “One rationale for teaching the CCLS is that demands for mathematical competence in today’s world have greatly increased” (Saunders, Bethune, Spooner & Browder, 2013, p. 27). Students with disabilities are still given the same opportunity to earn degrees and go on to be successful in a field of their choice and have a career; as it holds true for students in general education (Saunders et al.). Research shows that many of the challenges for students with disabilities, when thinking

mathematically, is they lack the most basic mathematical skills. With the implementation of the CCLS, math is now presented through word problems. If students with disabilities have difficulty comprehending texts, higher level text at that, then when presented with a math word problem, they are unable to connect the correct math operation with the vocabulary given in the problem and struggle to understand what the problem is asking (Saunders et al.).

Planning and Preparation.

Saunders et al. (2013) conducted research experiments on students with disabilities in math. The findings concluded that students with disabilities often struggle in math; however, they are not near plateauing and need to continue to be challenged in order to show growth. When teaching students with disabilities, it is the sole responsibility of the teacher to expose students to grade level material while supplementing the material with differentiated tasks at the students' instructional level (Saunders et al.).

Teachers create objectives that align with the topic they are to teach in math and select CCLS to correlate with their objectives. Math is often mapped out for teachers and they are advised what topic to teach and detailed curriculum map which includes dates of math units that are to be taught. Following the curriculum and knowing ahead of time what they will be teaching in math class allows students to collaborate with other service providers, such as speech, to pre-teach and pre-assess students in that area. Teachers use modeling, repetition, and hands-on manipulatives throughout the unit. In addition to those practices, teachers identify real-life activities which allow students to use the skill. This instructional practice puts the math material that is being taught into perspective when presented in a real-life problem. Also, the CCLS promotes and is moving towards using real-life scenarios (Thurlow & Quenemoen, 2012). Lastly, math instruction included providing specific, step-by-step instruction to students.

Students with disabilities benefit greatly from a step-by-step procedure, routine, and/or check-lists. By giving these supplementary strategies, students with disabilities can have a strategy on how to begin a math problem.

Summary

According to research and recent studies, there are many effective instructional practices that teachers can use throughout their classroom when teaching students with disabilities. Part of the responsibility of the teacher is finding a way to teach the material that is given to them in the most effective way. Instructional practices deemed effective include modeling, scaffolded practices and differentiated material. With the newly implemented CCLS and the rigorous expectations that students are held to, teachers must be prepared to teach the material that meets the needs of students. This self-study will not only collect data on my own teachings but it will give explicit evidence of instructional practices that work and instructional practices that do not work within my own classroom.

Not every instructional practice will have the same effect in every classroom. Classrooms are made up of different demographics, and teachers need to look at those demographics and determine what will be the most successful practice to teach their students. Part of this process is trial and error. An instructional practice may be used and the realization is that it may not work even though it is evidence based. Teachers needs to use instructional practices and acclimate it to their classrooms and students and discover whether it was successful or not.

Chapter 3: Methods

Participants

In this self-study, I was the only participant. The results demonstrated how I evaluated myself and my teaching practices. I researched how I can best support my students while implementing the CCLS. Therefore, I only evaluated myself and analyzed data that I have generated through my daily teachings, professional development, and formal observations.

Setting

The setting of this self-study took place in my classroom. I work for Smith Central School District (pseudo name). Smith Central School District is located in the suburbs of New York where students are able to take the bus to and from school for transportation. I teach in a 4th and 5th grade special education 15:1 self-contained classroom. A self-contained classroom is a program with a small number of students, all who are classified with a disability, and the lead teacher is a special education teacher. The students in the classroom and their work material were not used as part of my research or data. The elementary building in which I teach has kindergarten through fifth grade. Each grade level has three sections. There is a 15:1 self-contained classroom for Kindergarten and first grade that is combined, a second and third grade that is combined, and fourth and fifth grade that is combined. The school faculty consists of general education teachers, special education teachers, media specialists, enrichment specialists, special area teachers (physical education, music, and art), psychologist, counselor, classroom aides, and clerical aides. The demographics of the schools include: 93% Caucasian, 3% African-American, 3% Asian, and 1% other. District-wide, the socio-economic status which is measured by the amount of free/reduced lunches is 12% of students.

Personality as the Researcher

The position I hold presently as a 15:1 self-contained special education teacher for fourth and fifth grade is a one year long-term position. Prior to this position, I have had long-term substitute assignments in fifth and first grade. Prior to that, I worked as a teaching assistant in a special education 8:1:1 self-contained classroom. An 8:1:1 self-contained classroom consists of no more than eight students, one special education teacher, and one teaching assistant. An 8:1:1 classroom is a program that provides instruction for students with learning, behavioral, social, and/or emotional concerns. These students follow the same curriculum as other students in their grade level but are in a classroom where they have access to a social worker and/or counselor regularly (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2011). I have been part of Smith Central School District for the past five years. I graduated from Medaille College with teaching certification in general education, grades one through six. As I continued in my educational path to obtaining a Master's Degree in Literacy, I received a teaching certification in Special Education. Presently, I am working towards a Master's degree in Literacy at the College of Brockport, State University of New York.

Methods of data collection

The purpose of this study was to determine how, in my position as a special education teacher, I can implement instructional practices that will allow growth for my students while using and supporting district-wide curriculum and CCLS. In order to study my instructional practices, I collected data daily of my instruction. While planning for upcoming lessons, I used a template that I had created (Appendix A) to ensure I was meeting the criteria. I had to plan an objective and implement CCLS, task analysis, guided practice, and independent practice. By using this template for planning, I was able to have evidence that all of those were in place

before the lesson was taught. I gathered data from lesson plans that I created, reflections on those daily lessons, formal observations that were evaluated by an administrator, and new evidence-based instructional practices that were presented in professional development that were implemented in my teachings.

Lesson Plans and Reflections

One form of data analysis that I used was a collection of lesson plans and reflections on how a particular lesson went in regard to my own teaching methods and instructional practices that were used in that lesson. I chose to collect qualitative data because it gave me an opportunity to analyze my own feeling on the lesson; what was strong in the lesson and what I could improve (Morse, 1994). For six weeks of data collection, I consistently recorded lesson plans and objectives (Appendix A). By using that form, I was able to consider all parts of what makes a good lesson. I began by stating what subject it was in that time period. After selecting the subject matter that was to be taught, I wrote an objective for that time period that I created for myself and posted for students. An objective is a class goal in what is to be achieved in that time period. By recording the objective, it allowed me to reflect on the content of what I wanted to have achieved, the amount of time given, and the rigor of the academic task. The objective is written in simple terms because I wanted it to be understood by students and purposeful. With that said, objectives that are poorly written seem to not be purposeful which then are not met.

The next category is Method/strategy/Instruction Practice. This category was heavily analyzed in how the instruction was presented; for example, use of visuals, use of technology, and/or movement within the classroom. The data collected on instructional practices is the research needed to solve the research question(s) and was used on how I can support students with disabilities, teaching methods that meet the needs of students with disabilities. Input/output

is the “bare-bones” of the lesson and how students will receive information through my instruction (input) and what they will do with that information from my instruction (output). Right after teaching that specific lesson, I noted the important information. I noted how I was feeling at that particular moment. That allowed me to remember key information that I used later in the written reflection. Each evening, I reflected on lessons I taught that day. My reflections included the methods I used, how I prepared for that lesson, what I think I did well, what I could have done better, etc. Reflection is a great source for honesty, and when I reflected on my own methods after the lesson had taken place, I was able to truthfully write how I felt during the lesson and if I did the best I could have done for my students. Once I was in the routine of writing reflection after reflection, I was able to be more honest and critical of my own practices.

Formal Observations

In my role as a long-term substitute teacher, hired for a one-year term, I am required to have three formal observations that are to be conducted by administrators within the district. These observations are required for purposes of APPR in the rating of my effectiveness as a teacher. An administrator will meet with me prior to the observation to discuss the lesson that he/she will be seeing. The same administrator will then come to my classroom and observe the lesson that was discussed and look for evidence of the teacher standards three through five, and, lastly, the administrator and I will meet after the lesson to discuss the ratings I was given and why I was given those ratings. I used the information from those observations to reflect on my instructional methods and practices and apply those to future lessons.

Professional Development

The district in which I was hired believes in professional development and that it is truly necessary in order for consistency within the district and to present new evidence-based

instructional practices. Professional development that is offered in my district is proof of investment in me as an employee and shows support from administrators to teachers. Administrators want the teachers to continue to learn and implement new teachings based on recent, updated research, and administrators are pushing to have teachers trained with no repercussion, with their financial support. Many districts have had to forego professional development because of budgeting or mandate professional development before or after school. As I am a new teacher, I am required to attend a number of professional developments and encouraged to attend a number of other opportunities that are offered throughout the district. The information presented in professional development seminars/workshops vary from classroom management, parent-teacher conferencing tips, lesson planning, and many more. Monthly, I am required to attend a professional development that is held afterschool; however, I am also mandated to attend professional developments that have duration of three consecutive work days. All of the information presented in those seminars is applicable in my everyday teachings. I implement the information from professional development into my instruction and scaffold and differentiate it to fit the needs of my students and the means of the content which is being taught.

As a requirement of being a newly hired a teacher, each month I must attend a “new teacher seminar” which has tips for new teachers on different topics. For example, September focused on planning, October focused on attitude, November focused on professionalism, etc. Prior to the school year starting, it was also required to attend New Teacher Orientation which is where all the newly hired faculty came together for three days and met the administration and began training for the year. The orientation included the district strategic plan and initiatives, introductions and tours, expectations, APPR, etc. In addition to partaking in New Teacher Orientation, each new teacher was required to take Five Core Classes that must be complete in

order to obtain tenure. There is a procedure that has to be followed before taking certain core classes but the first two that must be taken within the first year of being hired are Classroom Management and Elements of Instruction. I took Classroom Management prior to the school year starting because it was helpful to have a foundation of how a classroom is to be set up and started from the beginning of the year. I later enrolled for elements instructions, which I then learned was the most vital, important class that should have been taken before the beginning of the year

Procedures

In order for data collection to be meaningful, I consistently recorded each lesson (Appendix A). By doing this, it helped me to measure and collect data on my own instructional practices and to determine whether or not the objective was met. I reflected daily on each lesson and reflected solely on my own instructional practices and focused on the teaching methodology, not on students' achievement. I used two formal observations. The first observation was conducted by the Director of Special Education at Smith Elementary School, and the second observation was conducted by the Principal of the Elementary School. From both of those observations, I was rated based upon the APPR rubric (Appendix C), and both administrators looked for evidence for the teaching standards three through five. I was then rated ineffective, developing, effective, or highly effective on standards one through five. This information was valid and used to drive my research because the administrators had observed my teaching methods and the effectiveness of the instructional practices that I used within the classroom. I also changed teaching practices with the information gained in professional development and through guidance from my mentor. My mentor is a veteran special education teacher that has been working in special education for sixteen years in Smith Central School District. Every newly hired teacher is required to have a mentor. My mentor and I meet a number of times a year

and complete a mentor evaluation check-list throughout the year (Appendix D). This data collection will be used to answer my research questions:

1. Am I meeting the needs of my students in 4th and 5th grade according to CCLS, the district requirements, and their IEP requirements?
2. How am I supporting my students as the special education teacher who is responsible for all of my students being exposed to grade-level material and allowing students to make gains academically?
3. As I monitor my own instructional practices, how am I monitoring those practices and how can I change my practices to be more effective in the classroom?

This data was used as evidence which indicated I was using CCLS and district requirements while planning, I have been providing students with disabilities opportunities to work with grade level material, and I have differentiated grade level material through different instructional practices.

Trustworthiness

Due to the fact that this research was completed as a self-study lends itself to prove that this research was conducted through fidelity on studying my own teaching methodology and how effective I am, not how well students respond to my teaching. The lessons were originated based on the criteria required and my own, personal teaching practices in which students received information. The observations were completed during the research and were completed based on what administrators saw while observing in my classroom. Observations are unique because every observation is specific and different. The data collection is valid in regards my own teaching because this is a self-study.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how I can best support students with disabilities while still meeting CCLS and district requirements. I began collecting data to answer my three research questions:

1. Am I meeting the needs of my students in 4th and 5th grade according to CCLS, the district requirements, and their IEP requirements?
2. How am I supporting my students as the special education teacher, who is responsible for all students being exposed to grade-level material and allowing students to make gains academically?
3. As I monitor my own instructional practices, how am I monitoring those practices and how can I change my practices to be more effective in the classroom?

As I carefully examined the data collected, I found many common themes. I found these commonalities by coding reflections where I felt extremely proud or extremely disappointed and what led to those strong emotions. In addition to coding, I was able to find commonalities amongst professional development and implementing what I had learned in the seminar in my classroom. Lastly, ratings from administrators on formal observations helped to guide my research.

Theme 1: Consistent use of Instructional Practices

The first common theme I found after closely analyzing the data is using certain instructional practices consistently. While planning all the different components of a lesson, I found that the evidence-based instructional practices need to be used consistently in order to be effective. I used to think if I was using evidence-based instructional practices, I was teaching

correctly. Now I see that even though I may use evidence-based instructional practices, it is not instant gratification or result in automatic success. Each instructional practice takes practice and needs to be used to the teacher's discretion and enhance teaching.

According to the data, I was using evidence-based instructional practices that I was trained to use in a seminar through professional development. As I read through reflections, I noticed how frustrated I was with how I taught specific material. On October 9's reflection for Shared Reading, I wrote, "I still feel unaccomplished. I taught the strategy, I modeled the strategy, I gave guided practice but I still feel like I let my students down." Now looking back on the reflection, I let my students down because I didn't have a proper anticipatory set, I didn't scaffold the activity, didn't provide explicit small/individual instruction, and my objective was unclear.

After reading through the data, I understand now that, although I may be using evidence-based instructional practices, it does not mean I will have instant success in my instruction.

Evidence-based instructional practices, even though they have proven to work, may not be effective in every classroom due to the dynamic of the classroom and may need to be altered or adjusted in order to fit what I am teaching. On October 21, I wrote a reflection after a writing class and said, "That felt good! The lesson felt like it had good rhythm and I was happy." I looked back to see what the lesson was, and I had students comparing and contrasting two articles. I began with an anticipatory set where I compared and contrasted a spoon and a fork. I used manipulatives as I modeling the task. When the task was given to the students, I had already differentiated the articles and cut the certain lines that I wanted them to concentrate on. Students used hoola hoops as their Venn-Diagram. As I look at the data now, my lesson on October 21st was completely differentiated and more effective than prior lessons.

Theme 2: Challenges of Too Many Instructional Practices

The next theme I found consistently in the data was the use of too many instructional practices in my daily instruction. Professional development is mandated at Smith Central School District (pseudo name) because it is the district belief that professional development supports teachers and allows and encourages professional growth. While in attendance at a workshop for close reading, there were five presenters with a very full agenda. In seven hours, the attendees were taught six annotations, six signposts and five critical lenses, which are all strategies for close reading. In addition to learning those close reading strategies, teams were responsible for creating one lesson for either a signpost or critical lens that could be used in each classroom. At the beginning, I was excited because I knew I wanted to begin working on close reading strategies with my students and maybe even teach one of the signposts for a formal observation for an administrator. The day concluded and I instantly began planning and how I could implement these strategies into my own classroom.

I began by teaching my class close reading strategy of using annotations. The first day I taught the first annotation and I tried to use three different instructional practices. In my reflection for that day I wrote, "I am doing way too much....I wanted to hit on all of the ways that I was taught at the seminar because I understood easily that way but I showed my students three different ways to use it." When I wrote that I was doing too much, there was not purpose for using three different instructional practices. I determined that using one effective instructional practice could reach my students. I then began using one instructional practice and explicitly teaching that strategy. After I explicitly taught students the strategy, my reflection had a successful tone. Now as part of my teaching I use instructional practices but I keep it simple.

For one lesson, there may be a need where I will use more than two instructional practices, which are acceptable as long as it is purposeful. I determined how purposeful it was by the amount of re-teaching I needed to do after two to three sessions of explicit instruction and collecting formative assessments which helped me to drive my instruction.

On October 8th, I wrote a reflection after writing. The writing lesson was taking information from a graphic organizer to begin drafting an essay. I gave students scaffolded draft paper where I had them fill in blanks and complete sentences as part of their drafts. In my reflection I wrote, "I was up at the smartboard writing in all of the blanks! My students must have been so happy that I was giving them the answers." I found that I was giving my students the answers when what I wanted to do was model writing a draft. Now when I teach how to begin writing drafts, I model how to begin a draft that is on a different topic. After modeling what I have done then I will give my students the scaffolded draft and assist/support as needed rather than completing it for them. After modeling a different example I felt it was a more scaffolded lesson where I was setting up building blocks for students rather than giving them answers.

Theme 3: Administrators and Formal Observations

Third, I found throughout my data that my teaching revolved around formal observations rather than teaching to my students. As a new teacher, three formal observations need to be conducted by the end of the year. Each observation is done by an administrator in the district, and scores are determined by them based on the five out of the seven teaching standards (www.engageny.org). The first formal observation was given by the Director of Special Education. A pre-observation meeting was conducted where the formal lesson plan is discussed and how standards one and two were involved in the planning of the lesson plan. The director

then observed a thirty minute lesson in Shared Reading and looked for evidence of teaching standards three through five. After the administrator observed, a post-observation meeting was conducted where scoring was discussed on teaching standards one through five: ineffective (lowest), developing, effective, or highly effective (highest).

My observation was on October 9th where I was teaching the close reading strategy annotation (Appendix E) which is making a connection to the text. I went through my lesson by reading an article the students twice and then having them partner up to read it again and make connections to the text. I received my result from the administrator and for instructional practices I received a developing. After reading through the explanation of how I had come to receive a developing it seems I could have used more differentiation in my lesson. For example, the students all received the same text. Each group of students could have received a smaller portion of text depending on their instructional levels. I also could have checked for understanding by checking with students to be sure they understood the directions. Two groups did not know the expectations or the purpose of what they were doing because they had asked me during the lesson what they were supposed to be doing.

Instructional Practice (developing)

- **Element III.3C. – Implements challenging learning experiences**– Christina’s anticipatory set included: asking the students questions regarding the previous lesson on using annotations with text. She called on a student who responded with the correct answer. Students were then directed to turn and share their definitions of the “x” annotation with a partner. Following further modeling of when to use an “x” annotation, she led the students into the next and new topic for the day’s lesson, which was to learn the Links annotation and how it is used when reading text.
- Christina established the lesson objective by asking the students the question “who knows what an objective is?” Several students raised their hands to respond. Christina called on one student who answered that “it is like a goal.” She provided the student with the feedback that it was the correct answer. The objective was then written on the Smartboard by Christina. **Each student will make two connections to the text.**

- Christina's learning objectives included:
 1. Learners will demonstrate their understanding of annotating a nonfiction text (make connections) by verbally sharing a connection with the teacher – Christina attempted to challenge all students to make connections using the text throughout the lesson, however few students were able to demonstrate the output strategies described on her lesson plan.
 2. Learners will demonstrate applying the use of annotation (making connections) by drawing the connections symbol and collaborating with a peer – During the lesson I did not see evidence that most students were able to demonstrate this skill.
 3. Learners will demonstrate determining the appropriateness of their connection to the text by recording their connections in their guided organizers – Christina provided the students with the necessary materials to complete this learning objective which included the annotation chart, text, graphic organizer, and partners. However the students did not demonstrate this skill during the lesson.

- **Element III.4A. – Provides opportunities for collaboration – Integrating 21st Century skills into a lesson is critical toward improving student learning outcomes.** Christina used the “turn and talk” technique during the whole group read aloud portion of the lesson to encourage students to communicate their thoughts and ideas with each other. When the students transitioned to partner work I did not see evidence that students fully understood the task. I also would have liked to see more differentiating of student work tasks and leveled texts during this time. All students were given the same directions, materials, and outcome expectations. At the pre-conference we discussed the importance of using collaboration to enrich student learning and to practice a valuable 21st Century skill. However, during the lesson I did not see evidence that students were collaborating effectively nor did they have an opportunity to achieve the lesson objective which was to make two connections to the text. This information provides the teacher with valuable and useful information regarding where students are towards meeting the learning objective for the lesson.

I didn't react well to receiving a developing score and wanted to be sure I wouldn't get that score again. Rather than using this as a positive change for my students, I used it to gear up for my next formal observation that would be given by the principal in my elementary building.

As a result of receiving a developing score in instructional practices standard three, I justified my instructional practices by saying that shared reading is a block of time where students are taught reading strategies and given reading passages above their instructional level. Now looking back at my reflections and the comments the administrator gave to me based on that one lesson, I completely understand why I received a score of developing.

As I prepared for my second formal observation, I was determined not to receive another developing score for instructional practice. My reflections after my first observation included thoughts of determination and change in instructional practices. I reflected on scaffolded

activities I did, the way I modeled material, and my strong anticipatory sets and closings. In two of my reflections I wrote, "I will be ready for the next observation, I'm not developing." Now reading that, I should have been spending more time efficiently planning rather than worrying about one score from an administrator.

After my second formal observation was completed, I received another score of developing in teaching standard three: Instructional Practices.

III. Instructional Practice: HEDI Rating: Developing

- Teacher's spoken and written language is clear and correct. Graphic methods are used regularly to enhance content understanding. (III.2.D) During this lesson Christina used several graphic methods to help students with the concept. She has the signposts posters hung in the room for students to reference. She used the Smartboard to post and record information collected during the lesson. Students also have a signpost teacher created booklet to gather information and house definitions of each signpost.
- Teacher persists in seeking approaches to challenge and support all students, drawing on a broad repertoire of strategies, learning experiences and resources. (III.3.C) This lesson was based on staff development taken on Notice and Note signposts. Throughout the week students have been studying different signposts. Today they learned about memory moments. Christina reached out to other teachers to find out which story would help her students understand this concept the best. That is why she chose Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge, by Mem Fox for this lesson.
- Teacher's questions are a combination of open and closed questions. Some questions invite a thoughtful response and/or further discussion. (III.2.B) Christina I did not see any open ended questioning or asking students to expand on their thinking. This is extremely important in any lesson with any student but especially with self-contained students. I am happy to help you in this area and I would also reach out to your mentor and grade level colleagues.

I was again discouraged especially that I now received developing twice by two different administrators. After reading through comments from both observations, I came to many realizations. The first realization I came to was an observation is one period out of an entire instructional year. The administrator needs to look at that one lesson in isolation. The rating of developing does not define my entirety of being a teacher, just that one moment in time. From discussing these ratings with administrators and the expectations of a new teacher, it is my understanding those who receive scoring of developing or ineffective are teaching in jeopardy of

receiving a teacher improvement plan if they do not show growth. The expectation for a new teacher is if you receive one developing, the next observation should measure growth which result in not getting a score of developing. A second realization I came to was each administrator is different. Each administrator is looking for something different, which is evident based on the results from these two administrators. The first administrator wanted me to use more differentiaion and the second administration wanted me to ask more open ended questions. I cannot base my teaching on pleasing administrators. My third realization was I need to keep my focus on my students and where I am right now, not where I'll be in the future. With hard work, dedication, and focus, the scores of effective and highly effective with naturally come, rather than me only focusing on obtaining those scores.

Theme 4: Considering all components of lesson planning.

In the beginning of my data collection, each reflection had evidence of some kind of disappointment or frustration that I had while teaching material. One theme indicated by the data that consistently was shown was I taught one strong, effective lesson throughout the entire day. Each reflection for the first two to three weeks indicated that I was proud of one lesson throughout the day when I am teaching five to six a day in different content areas.

At the beginning of the research, I believed efficient planning was having an outline of what was to be taught and materials prepared for students. Now I see that efficient planning is touching upon each component of effective lessons. An effective lesson needs to have a strong introduction, anticipatory set, evidence based instructional practices and teaching methods, guided practice, independent practice, and a strong closure. Now when I plan, I take all of those different components into consideration.

One of my reflections ended with was “I didn’t feel effective.” When I delved into the data to see why I wrote that, I found the lesson I was referencing, I had not completed all of the components of a lesson. I did not have an engaging anticipatory set or closure, I didn’t set clear expectations, and I used an auditory approach. As a result of missing those key components of a lesson, I didn’t feel like I was effectively teaching. I did not realize I was doing this until I attended a professional development seminar on Elements of Instruction. Elements of Instruction is a course that is mandated for every teacher to take in Smith Central School District.

Elements of Instruction is the baseline program to prepare teachers for Cooperative Learning or Differentiation. This three-day program shares the research and theory of the interaction between the teacher and learner. The workshop will focus on specific instructional skills and strategies to update and reinforce the knowledge and abilities teachers have already obtained through their teaching experience; and to extend an understanding of the teaching process. Classroom follow-up is included. Please bring copies of standards and curriculum. Follow-up will take place in your classrooms in the Fall and Winter with a 15 minute post conference. We explore concepts such as: selection and creation of objectives, congruency, monitoring effective learning strategies such as active participation and motivation techniques, alignment of lessons with NYS Standards. This program defines the instructional language used by instructional staff in the Smith (pseudonym) Central School District.

This core class provided me with training on developing lesson plans. The instructor for the course was a teacher prior to being a facilitator for professional development and used evidence-based instructional practices to teach us. The instructor modeled her own expectations, which kept us actively engaged and included physical movement daily. As the training came to a close, she gave us resources of everything she had done and many more strategies to use in the classroom that would contribute to our success. I took this course after the first observation had been conducted and could truly see that receiving a developing rating in instructional practices standard was appropriate for that lesson. The lesson focused on strategy and I gave all students the same text. I have ten students, all on reading levels from 1st grade to 6th grade, and I gave all of them the same piece of reading, the text looked the same on each page, and the text was one

full page. Now after taking this seminar, I see that I should have either given them different readings or given students specific lines to look at rather than overwhelming students with one whole page with 14-point font. I also should have checked for understanding of the task and clarity to be sure the expectation was known before having students split into partners and attempt completing the task.

Theme 5: Professional Development Benefits

The fifth theme I found throughout my data was how beneficial professional development is and how much I use it within my classroom. After attending more than five professional development seminars, I discovered that everything I learned in professional development could be transferred into my classroom. At the beginning of the school year, as I enrolled for different professional development seminars, I only enrolled because I knew I had to. Now I see that professional development is great opportunity for professionals in education to continue to grow. With minor tweaking, I was able to implement better routines and procedures, create a strong rapport with students, and build a large repertoire of instructional practices. Now that I have attended those seminars, I may have gone to the seminars in a different sequential order, but realize that it is truly an advantage to have professional development offered in the school district. I would have chosen to go prior to the school year starting in the summer rather than in October. I would have liked to be established prior to the year beginning rather than changing my own expectations two months into the school year.

The data demonstrates that after each professional development I attended, I implemented at least one strategy/practice/idea in my own classroom. On November 3rd I wrote, “Even though I don’t like being out of my classroom, every seminar I attend truly can be used in my

classroom.” I wrote that because that day I used different questionings and prompts throughout my teaching, which I learned in the seminar: Quality Questioning and Assessments.

Theme 6: The more time spent, the better the outcome

Finally, the underlining theme that is most consistent throughout the data is, with more time dedicated to planning a lesson, the better I feel after teaching the lesson. At the beginning of the research and data collection, I thought planning for upcoming lesson plans meant preparing materials and having a loose outline of what I wanted to get accomplished. I would spend my time looking on the computer for different projects and worksheets. After finding a project or a worksheet that I was going to use, I would scaffold it or make minor changes to it. At the beginning of my research I thought having materials and tasks to be done was planning. Now, looking over the data, I see that planning is taking the time to plan how to teach the material rather than preparing materials.

In reflections towards the beginning of my research in early October, I would write, ” I was at school until 6:30 pm last night planning. I got all of my copies done.” This is evidence that I spent that night working until 6:30 p.m. on getting worksheets ready for the upcoming week. Towards the end of my reflections, in November, I wrote, ” Thursday night is my new plan night. I loosely plan each period then Thursday night I look at those loose plans and write out components of the lesson plan. I include the objective of what I want to get accomplished, instructional practices on how to teach the material, anticipatory set, students’ outcomes, and closures. I now plan this way because the data showed after planning that way, the areas of growth in my reflections were getting fewer and fewer. The few areas of growth that I record are areas that I can work with my mentor on and try to eliminate in upcoming lessons. Such as, the anticipatory set for each lesson which should be engaging and captivate students’ attention. I

have work with my mentor to improve mini-lessons to be more engaging and how I can get my students involved.

In my last reflection I wrote, “Quality planning = quality teaching.” Now I am not teaching to please my colleagues or administrators. I am teaching to my students and I am doing it in a way that can best support them and their needs.

Summary

After analyzing the data collected for this self-study, the themes I identified guided me to become a better teacher. The common themes that were consistent throughout the data was consistent use of instructional practices, challenges of too many instructional practices, administrators and formal observations, considering all components of lesson planning, professional development benefits, and more time spent planning made for a better lesson.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

This self-study gave me an opportunity to find how I can grow professionally. I used the data and data analysis to drive my instruction in hopes of becoming a better teacher. Through data analysis, I realized that there is more to being a good teacher than caring about the students. I always knew that I wanted to work with children, but this position goes beyond making positive relationships with children.

Research Questions

The purpose of conducting this self-study was to assess how I can reach my potential of being a special education teacher and teach the required curriculum, meet the CCLS, and meet the needs of all students. Using lesson plans, reflections, observations, and professional development helped me to collect data and answer those questions.

Conclusions

After analyzing the data I have determined many conclusions. Lesson planning is a way to be organized and prepared however does not record the outcome of the lesson. Recorded reflections after a lesson is telling of what was accomplished during the lesson. Observations which are formally conducted by administrators gave me good insight to my own teaching and where I could grow as a teacher however the scores do not define me as a teacher. Professional development is truly beneficial and teachers, new or veteran, should take advantage of the learning opportunity.

Lesson Plans and Reflections

For six weeks of research, I planned each lesson very specifically including: the CCLS that were being met for the lesson, an objective, and differentiated material. After the lesson was complete, I would reflect on each lesson. Later, the data showed the lessons I put more time into

and used strong evidence-based instructional practices, the better I felt in how I taught the lesson. Not only were the lessons more engaging with the more time that was put forth, I found that I was clearer with what I wanted in the result which didn't leave room for ambiguity.

On October 2nd I said that I wasn't prepared for teaching my students and didn't do any pre-teaching on a difficult subject of immigration. I didn't put any time into that lesson and, as a result, found that I could have done many things differently and better. In future planning, I want to be more prepared by pre-teaching students material who need repetition and explicit teaching. Also, consider how engaging the lesson is for students and how I can keep their attention.

Observations

Observations that were conducted by administrators challenged me in many different ways. I felt over confident for the first observation which in receiving a score of "developing" for the third standard: instructional practices. That was the turning point of my research and now, reviewing lesson plans, that was crucial point where I knew I needed to go outside of my comfort zone, ask for help, and spend more time on planning how I would teach material. This shift in my focus then resulted into attendance in more professional development. There are a certain number of professional developments which are mandatory of new teachers but also a large offering of professional development opened to all of the teachers in the district where anyone is able to attend. I also needed to look my instructional practices prior to the observation and determine more successful instructional practices in a self-contained special education setting.

Professional development

Seminars that I attending for professional development kept me up to date with recent research, an opportunity to work with different strategies, implementation plans, and work time with colleagues and administrators. This way of collecting data helped me to learn more

instructional practices that I could within my classroom. I was given opportunities to ask questions, plan, and confer with peers. My attendance at professional development allowed me to continue growing as a professional. Professional development gives specific insight on how and why teachers should be teaching curriculum. For example, Smith Central School District (pseudonym) requires students to use close reading strategies when given a text and professional development provided me with research as to why it is required for students to learn, how it can support students thinking, and why it is to be implemented into all classrooms in some form.

Implications

Based on the themes that were identified earlier, I have drawn two implications. Firstly, I need to feel good about my teaching in order for my teaching to be effective. Secondly, teachers feel as though they need to impress the hierarchy of the school when in reality the hard-work and passion possessed through work ethic will shine through.

I need to feel good about my teaching in order for it to be effective

Through analysis I found the only way I feel good about my teaching is through dedication and the drive to do well for my students. As I analyzed the data. I remember teaching to the administrators rather than teaching to the students. I thought if I taught well for the administrators that could lead to a permanent, probationary position compared to the one-year, long-term position I have now. After careful analysis of the data I collected, I think on the reasons I entered the teaching field in the first place. I entered into education because I wanted to make a difference in children's lives, not administrators' lives.

I am now able to prioritize based on my students' needs rather than making lesson plans to please my administrators. As I plan and prepare lesson plans, I keep my students in mind and

their needs. I feel less pressure as I am planning when I am planning for the students and thinking about their learning outcomes.

Many teachers often feel as though they need to impress the hierarchy of the school

The pressure in education on teachers continues to increase. With the implementation of The Common Core, teachers are now being assessed on their teaching performance as well as their students' performance. New teachers have additional pressure because they are trying to do well on their performance evaluation and trying to establish a reputation that other teachers acknowledge and respect. In recent research, it was found that many new teachers feel the need to impress veteran teachers and administrators to make a name for themselves (Melnick, 2013). Before this self-study I felt the same way. I wanted my colleagues around me to know that I am hard-working and receive high scores in regards to my performance. After conducting this self-study, I realized I am the only one who is putting that pressure on me. I do not need to worry about impressing my colleagues or administrators because, if I work hard and do my job well by teaching students, administrators will be able to see it on their own. Teachers who do what is expected of them and are passionate about their position will leave a lasting impression and a more humbled individual.

My focus shifted towards how to teach material rather than material I wanted to get done

Due to the new found researches of instructional practices for teachers, education is changing daily. With these changes, teachers continue to learn more on how to enhance their teaching and use different practices. This study allowed me to see that I needed to shift my focus from planning what materials I needed for lessons to planning a lesson and thinking what instructional practices will be effective in teaching that lesson. At the beginning of the research, I thought I was well prepared because I knew what I was going to teach and what I wanted to

cover each day. Now I realize that teaching is not about what I need to cover. Teaching is presenting new information to students and teaching it in the best way possible for students to understand it.

Now I plan by looking at the material I want to teach to my students and I use an evidence-based instructional practice or practices that support their needs. I understand now that being prepared does not only mean having differentiated worksheets copied. Being planned is to be ready to truly teach the material in a way that supports students' learning.

Recommendations

This self-study will be used as a good resource to all teachers, veteran teachers and new teachers. New teachers can use this self-study to reflect on their own teachings and instructional practices by looking at themselves honestly and seeing how they can improve and grow as an educator. Veteran teachers will be able to use this self-study in many ways. One reason veteran teachers should use this as a resource is because, although they may have been educators for more than ten years, education is changing. There will always be more recent research and evidence-based instructional practices that could be implemented into classrooms that we have not even discovered yet. All teachers need to be part of the changes in education and have that responsibility to their students to continue to strive for excellence in their own teaching. Some veteran teachers can be comfortable and set in their ways which is why they are reluctant to try to new practices. As a result of reluctance, professional growth will come to a stand-still.

This self-study could also be used as a resource for administrators to look at new teachers and their willingness to learn and their desire to continue learning and implementing the most recent research evidence based ideas into their classroom. Any position in education will

continue to change, from paraprofessional to superintendent, and this self-study allows educators to show the willingness of growth and a change in mindset.

Final Remarks

During this self-study I had the opportunity to look at myself in an honest light. For many people, this can be difficult to look at yourself in complete fidelity and admit to what you have done wrong or incorrectly. For me, this self-study was eye opening because I thought that I was doing everything right to be a great first-year teacher. I was collaborating with team members, taking students' needs into consideration, arriving to work early and staying after work late to be sure I had plans complete and was prepared for the upcoming days. I found that those components are not the formula to making a great teacher and that there is no formula for being the best teacher. I learned that formal observations are a great way to receiving professional, constructive criticism yet the ratings given by an administrator do not define you and your teaching over a year span. I learned that self-reflection allows you to recognize your strengths and weaknesses and allows you to learn from each experience and grow from it.

Education is an ever changing, unique business. With more researchers conducting studies on teachers, students, instruction, and much, much, more, the results will allow educators to continue to grow. This self-study was a learning opportunity for me and allowed me to grow as educator. As a result, I am becoming a better teacher. I have always been able to look at my own lessons and say what went well and what could have been better; now I am able to look at what I could have done better and make the change for the next lesson to be better and continue that cycle.

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Appendix A

Subject: Math Shared Reading	Writing Guided Reading	Science Guided Reading
Objective:		
Method/strategy/Instructional Practice:		
Input:		Output:
Notes at the time:		
Reflection:		

Appendix B

ANNOUNCED OBSERVATION REPORT

Name _____	Ten. _____ Prob. _____ PT _____ LTS _____
Subject/Grade Level _____	Date of Observation _____
Observer _____	School _____

Brief summary of the observation:

The following are reflections of the instructional/professional practices observed:

- I. **Knowledge of Students and Student Learning** (HEDI rating)

- II. **Knowledge of Content and Instructional Planning** (HEDI rating)

- III. **Instructional Practice** (HEDI rating)

- IV. **Learning Environment** (HEDI rating)

- V. **Assessment for Student Learning** (HEDI rating)

Conclusion and other comments including an overall HEDI rating.

_____ Signature & Title of Observer	_____ Date
--	---------------

_____ Signature of Faculty Member (indicates document has been received)	_____ Date
---	---------------

Faculty member's comments/clarifications: (use additional space as necessary)

C: Personnel file via the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, Observer, Faculty Member, Principal

*NYSUT's Teacher Practice Rubric
Aligned with the
New York State Teaching Standards*

Standard 1: Knowledge of Students and Student Learning

Teachers acquire knowledge of each student and demonstrate knowledge of student development and learning to promote achievement for all students. *not enough for teachers to know and understand childhood or adolescent developmental norms. Teachers must also know their students' aptitudes and weaknesses, their interests, their readiness levels and skill sets, and the outside influences that affect their learning: family dynamics, cultural customs, and socio-economic status. Furthermore, teachers must demonstrate this knowledge and understanding and also incorporate 21st Century Skills in the planning and preparation of their lessons.*

Indicator 1.1: Teachers demonstrate knowledge of child and adolescent development, including students' cognitive, language, social, emotional, and physical developmental levels.

SED indicators: Describe orally and in writing an understanding of the developmental characteristics of their students; create developmentally appropriate lessons that address student learning differences and needs; Teachers implement lessons and modify instruction in student developmental needs.

Indicators	Ineffective	Developing	Effective	Highly Effective
Describes developmental characteristics of students	Teacher is unable to describe orally or in writing the developmental characteristics of the age group.	Teacher describes orally and in writing some knowledge of the developmental characteristics of the age group.	Teacher describes orally and in writing an accurate knowledge of the typical developmental characteristics of the age group, as well as exceptions to the general patterns.	In addition to an knowledge of the developmental characteristics of the age group, and even the general patterns, teacher describes in writing the group which individuals follow the general pattern and how 21st Century Skills fit into this knowledge base.
Creates developmentally appropriate lessons	Teacher does not create lessons that are developmentally appropriate or that address individual student learning needs.	Teacher creates lesson plans that are generally appropriate to the developmental needs of students and meet the student learning needs of groups of students.	Teacher creates lesson plans that are appropriate to the developmental needs of students and meet the student learning differences and needs of groups of students.	Teacher creates lesson plans that are appropriate to the developmental needs of students and meet the student learning differences and needs of individual students.

Following New Teacher Orientation.....

Task	If questions, see...	Completed (√)
Classroom Management		
Obtain and set up plan book.	K-5 Team Leader or Mentor	
Obtain preliminary classroom schedule.	K-5 Team Leader, Administrator or Mentor	
Develop a preliminary classroom management plan including behavioral expectations, rewards, and consequences.	K-5 Team Leader or Mentor	
Plan the set-up of your classroom including use of physical space, bulletin boards, and seating arrangement.	K-5 Team Leader Or Mentor	
Set up a substitute teacher folder.	K-5 Team Leader or Mentor	
Curriculum/Assessments		
Obtain and review grade level curriculum and learning standards in Atlas for September.	Administrator	
Operational		
Review teacher handbook.	Administrator	
Familiarize yourself with school procedures for cafeteria, hallway, playground, attendance, and lunch count.	K-5 Team Leader or Mentor	
Familiarize yourself with fire drill and emergency evacuation procedures (Emergency Response Plan).	K-5 Team Leader or Mentor	
Review the Teacher Observation Process and Annual Performance Review.	Administrator, K-5 Team Leader or Mentor	
Authenticate your badge with the copier in your school for copying, scanning and faxing.	Administrator, K-5 Team Leader or Mentor	

Mentor Signature: _____

Completion Date: _____

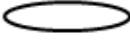
Annotation Guide

K-3

	Underline main ideas and details
	Star important ideas and/or vocabulary
	Circle words you don't know
	When reading something shocking or impressive
	When you have a question

Annotation Guide

4-5

	Underline main ideas and details
	Star important ideas and/or vocabulary
	Circle words you don't know
	When reading something shocking or impressive
	When you have a question
	When something is confusing
	When you make a connection to the text
	When you come across something that contradicts what you know or expect