Writing Steps to Success allows Reluctant Writers to Succeed

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Students who struggle with writing will most often avoid the task, further exacerbating their lack of skill. Reluctant learners, as they are often referred to in the literature, avoid challenges and do not complete tasks (Protheroe, 2004). Through their school careers, these students have felt frustrated, confused and ashamed of their performance, receiving negative feedback about their school work from both teachers and parents, resulting in further disengagement from academic tasks (Hebb, 2000).

Bandura (1994) believes that self-efficacy, a person's beliefs about their own capabilities to perform, shapes how one feels, thinks, is able to be motivated, and behaves. Those students with a high sense of self-efficacy soar, viewing difficulties as challenges. In contrast, students with a low sense of self-efficacy avoid difficult tasks, perseverating on their own deficiencies, the obstacles to achievement, and anticipating a poor quality outcome.

"Reluctant learners need to be both challenged and supported if they are to develop the self-efficacy they need to take risks and succeed" (Protheroe, 2004, p. 46). Alderman (1999) outlines several specific strategies that can enhance a student's perceived self-efficacy, boosting their academic performance; some of these include modeling, constructive feedback, goal setting, and rewards. In addition, Protheroe (2004) indicates that relevancy, student involvement in their learning, and encouragement are variables that assist the reluctant learner to succeed.

Writing Steps to Success is designed to intervene with those students who do not write, who avoid the task of writing, and who perform poorly when they do write. Incorporating the strategies designed to promote student engagement, the program was piloted in several settings. The first was a minimum security prison for adult males in the Canadian province of New Brunswick. Five men seeking their GED, and who had previously failed the writing portion of the exam, were instructed using the *Writing Steps to Success* intervention program for writing. When again taking the examination, all five were successful on the writing test.

Another pilot was conducted in a fourth/fifth grade combination class for English Language Learner (ELL) students in a border town in Arizona. The state of Arizona currently tests only fifth grade students in the area of writing, and those results have not yet been released. However, anecdotal reports from the experienced classroom teacher indicate her confidence in the results. She states, "All of my students who previously scored non-proficient on the district benchmarks scored proficient on the final benchmarks."

A third classroom piloting the program was a regular third grade classroom with a brand new teacher, located in a rural location in southern Arizona. Rather than using the program as intervention, this teacher implemented the program vertically, teaching the whole class the basics of writing. Although there is no state test measuring the students' progress in writing, the pre- and post- writing samples showed significant growth in the student's ability to stay on topic and to create a complete sentence. The classroom teacher was pleased to have a structure for teaching students the steps in the writing process in a manner that promoted student success and mastery.

As the implementation of this writing program spreads, further results will be collected and shared.

References

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