

Promoting Self-Awareness and Self-Advocacy for Students with Disabilities: A Self-Study

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Abstract

Using the MEI Lessons for Teaching Self-Awareness & Self-Advocacy (Cantley et al., 2010) as a guideline, I created "bell ringers" to teach transition age students with disabilities about self-awareness and self-advocacy in regards to their disability and IEP. I taught these skills to a small group of four students. Every day, these four students met for 10 minutes during the start of the day. The research conducted is self-study research (Hauge, 2021). For all students with disabilities, especially at the transition age, self-awareness and self-advocacy is so important. To be able to continue teaching these lessons after this experience, I reflected on my teaching of these skills, the gathering of materials, how well the materials encouraged student growth, student involvement, etc. I conducted this research to improve myself as a professional educator. I reflected on the challenges in these lessons and how to work through them.

Introduction

- Self-study research is a way for teachers to systematically examine their teaching practice and their impact on student learning.
- Intention is to better understand oneself, instruction, and learning; and the development of knowledge related to these factors (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2004).
- One way to apply self-study is to examine the curriculum modifications needed to meet the needs of students with more intensive support needs.
- The purpose of this study was to examine the modifications made to a curriculum and reflect on how these modifications impacted student learning.
- Questions that guided the self-study included:
 - What modifications to the MEI Curriculum are needed to support students with more intensive support needs?
 - How can self-study research assist teachers in their future teaching.

Methodology

- The MEI Lessons for Teaching Self-Awareness & Self-Advocacy consists of 10 units to help students increase their self-awareness and self-advocacy and understand their IEP. I organized key information into PowerPoint slides, used as "bell ringers." Pulling the information I found most relevant and beneficial to my students, I created 30 "bell ringers." Students and I worked on these bell ringers for 30 consecutive school days (excluding special days, such as field trips). During morning work, I pulled four students to work with. Two students qualify for special education services under a Moderate Intellectual Disability, one student qualifies under a Mild Intellectual Disability and one student under a Mild Intellectual Disability and one student qualifies under a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder. All students are in the 8th grade and will be transitioning to high school next year. During instruction, topics discussed included:
 - Student's strengths and weaknesses in and out of school
 - Student's likes and dislikes
 - Special education laws and terms (i.e., IEP, IDEA, goals, objectives, accommodations, modifications, Annual Review, Transition Meeting)
 - Student's individual accommodations/modifications
- To start the lesson, I displayed the bell ringer activity on the board. I read the bell ringer to the group, and the students responded to the questions on a piece of paper. I prompted students' thinking when needed. We then discussed their responses as a group.

Bell Ringer Unit 1 Activity 2

- Name 3 of your biggest **strengths**
- Name 3 of your biggest **weaknesses**
- Explain how each of those strengths and weaknesses affect you here at school.

Bell Ringer Unit 1 Activity 8

- Write down the word "Self-Advocacy"
- Explain how each of those strengths and weaknesses affect you here at school.
- What does the word "Self" mean
- What does the word "Advocacy" mean? Hook it up on your computer!
- How does that word apply to you in school? When are times you must have self-advocacy?

Results

In order for the MEI Lessons for Teaching Self-Awareness & Self-Advocacy to best benefit my students, I modified the curriculum.

I found that the MEI Curriculum is catered towards students with Specific Learning Disabilities. In the curriculum, there are many scenarios describing students with learning disabilities who spend the majority of their day in a general education classroom. My students are only in the general education setting for lunch, recess, and specials. I did not add these scenarios to the bell ringers because they did not relate to my students. However, I modified many of these scenarios to relate to my students. For example, instead of a scenario starting, "Mike is high school student with a specific learning disability and attends the general education classroom for all classes except English...," I would start the scenario by saying "Mike is a 14 year old middle school student with a moderate intellectual disability, who spends most of his day in a special education classroom."

Because each bell ringer activity was only 10 minutes long, I pulled out the information that I found most important out of the curriculum. I created each bell ringer to be clear, concise, and easy for my students to understand.

To organize materials, I gave each student a folder to keep all bell ringer materials in. For activities with more information, I preprinted worksheets to help students organize their thoughts and ideas.

When reflecting on my teaching, I analyzed students' understanding of the lessons. The students were able to identify their strengths, but had a hard time identifying their weaknesses and how to request assistance to help them succeed. Students were familiar with the IEP process, but did not understand all the parts of their IEP.

MEI Scale

The MEI Scale form is a handwritten document with two columns of questions. The left column contains 10 questions, and the right column contains 10 questions. Each question is followed by a line for the answer. The questions are as follows:

Left Column:

1. I have a good understanding of my strengths and weaknesses.
2. I know how to ask for help when I need it.
3. I know how to ask for help when I need it.
4. I know how to ask for help when I need it.
5. I know how to ask for help when I need it.
6. I know how to ask for help when I need it.
7. I know how to ask for help when I need it.
8. I know how to ask for help when I need it.
9. I know how to ask for help when I need it.
10. I know how to ask for help when I need it.

Right Column:

1. I know how to ask for help when I need it.
2. I know how to ask for help when I need it.
3. I know how to ask for help when I need it.
4. I know how to ask for help when I need it.
5. I know how to ask for help when I need it.
6. I know how to ask for help when I need it.
7. I know how to ask for help when I need it.
8. I know how to ask for help when I need it.
9. I know how to ask for help when I need it.
10. I know how to ask for help when I need it.

The form is filled out with handwritten answers, including "Yes", "No", and "Sometimes".

Conclusion

Self-study research can assist teachers with future teaching. During my research, I used the MEI Lessons for Teaching Self-Awareness & Self-Advocacy (Cantley et al., 2010) to create "bell ringers" to complete with students 10 minutes at the start of the day. During the process, I analyzed student understanding of the content taught. I learned which lessons kept students engaged and captured their attention, which lessons students strayed off task, and which lessons students had a hard time understanding the content. By learning this information, I can understand the best way to organize information for my students, and adjust my future teaching.

References

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