Teaching Self-regulation to SPED Students: An Intervention

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Teaching Self-regulation to SPED Students: An Intervention

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Abstract

This capstone project examined the impact of self-regulation and executive functioning skills of using a planner on eighth-grade students with missing assignments, who have mild to moderate learning disabilities, and other health impairments that impact their learning. Self-regulated learning strategies and executive skills, such as using a daily homework planner were explicitly taught during a five-lesson intervention to eight, eighth-grade Special Education (SPED) students during a Guided Study Hall class. The data was compared to students of similar ability who did not receive intervention. This study took place over three weeks; this study tracked rates of students missing work for one week before, during, and after the intervention. Data collected was analyzed and was found that with direct instruction on “What a planner is and how to use it effectively”, students’ missing assignments rates decreased.

Background

Through collaboration with my mentor teacher and the school’s director of SPED, I planned, taught, and analyzed data from a three-week study of teaching a self-regulation skill, using a planner. The objective of this study was to use direct instruction to teach special education students self-regulation skills so that they could use a planner independently to decrease the number of missing assignments per week. This research took place during my clinical practice for Secondary Special Education. Uniquely, I fulfilled my clinical practice requirements while being a long-term substitute for the eighth-grade Special Education Resource position at a suburban public middle school district, in Nebraska. As of the 2022-2023, this middle school has 911 students. According to the Nebraska Department of Education, 31% are eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch, 9.35 % are eligible for Special Education Services, 44% are gifted or high-ability learners, and 4.5% are English Language Learners. Demographics of
the population include: 75% of the school race is White, with the next highest being Hispanic or Latino 10%, and the other 25% of the population includes Black or African American, two or more races, and others.

Planning is an important skill to practice in life because being organized is an important skill of independent living. Gaumer & Noonan write about why teaching students the skills they need to succeed is important. "... students report that they do not know how to effectively plan for success and often rely on others to direct their actions" (2021, p.35). The skills to be taught are being able to create steps on how to complete something or to look ahead to be able to manage time and responsibilities. It is important to teach skills to be successful, and not to assume that such skills are natural or already known. Special Education students may lack the skills to complete their responsibilities without help. Planning is incorporated into all aspects of life.

Planning is an important skill for life because it is a skill needed for independence. According to Dawson & Guare, “Executive Skills are the skills that are required to execute tasks– to take an idea from start to finish…” (2009, p.10). Self-regulation skills are needed to be actively involved in self-actions and control. Under self-regulation, cognitive regulatory strategies are at the highest level. It helps students mentally create and design goals and a plan to get to them (Eilam & Aharon, 2003) In learning both of these skills are required to engage the brain, focus behavior, and sustain motivation. In return, these skills allow learning efficiency and possibly higher achievements.

Many times, self-regulation and executive skills are assumed to be had by all people. Oftentimes, these skills are not taught explicitly, rather the skills are obtained through experiences. However, for students with a disability, trial by doing may not be enough for them
to pick up on skills that they need. Also, it may be difficult to generalize skills into all areas. For this reason, it is valuable to explicitly teach or give step-by-step instructions on physical and emotional skills that students might need. It is important not to assume that all students have the same abilities and skills; not everyone has had the same learning opportunities.

Introduction

Keeping track of assignments and deadlines uses self-regulation functioning skills. Failure to remember leads to missed due dates; work piles up, and it is difficult to get back on track. Eighth-grade special education (SPED) students are particularly challenged when faced with organization and lack the skills to address them. These skills are necessary for students to be successfully independent. Does targeting specific self-regulation skills of using a planner increase students’ executive functioning skills among eighth-grade SPED students?

Research by Montroy et al., (2016) found that self-regulation development, an umbrella term for many sub-skills, begins in infancy but develops over time. Yet, the development of skills happens at different times and rates. The previous research also indicates that skills have relative markers; age can affect the ability to use multiple skills simultaneously. It is important to learn self-regulation skills so that one can be successful. Planners, for example, help organize students’ work and help track their assignments.

This research was completed in a suburban public school district, in Nebraska. During Guided Study Hall, a small group of eight, eighth-grade SPED students received intervention on the self-regulation and executive functioning skill of using a planner. The collected data was collected on the number of missing assignments per student and was compared to students of similar ability who did not receive intervention.

This project was completed over three weeks. Week one: Students were observed, and
their missing work was tracked. Students received support each day and were encouraged to turn in their work. This initial week set the baseline for missing assignments. Week two: Five targeted lessons were taught with direct instruction. These lessons centered around executive skills with the intention of teaching skills for independence. The main goal of these lessons was to show how using a planner creates independence, for it is a tool to track responsibilities. Each day, students practiced the skills as a group. Week three: Students independently filled out their own planners. When students came to Guided Study Hall, planners were checked to make sure that students had the correct information. Data collected from the school's grade book recorded the impact of the intervention and showed success in meeting deadlines among students who received support.

This study was significant due to its focus on addressing students’ needs. The lessons taught during this study revolved around social-emotional skills for students with mild to moderate disabilities. Skills such as effective communication, organization, and time management will aid students in being successful in every aspect of their academic, personal, and professional lives. These important life skills will allow students more independence throughout their lives.

Participants

The subjects of this study who received intervention were eight students who were placed in a guided study hall because they required small group or one-on-one support. Moreover, they all receive SPED services and are classified as mild to moderate. Individuals with mild to moderate disabilities need minimal levels of support to learn, acquire skills, and navigate the world day to day. Out of the eight students, there were seven males and one female. Five students are eligible for SPED services under the qualification of Other Health Impairment (OHI); of this
group, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is the primary disorder. Three students have a specific learning disability. This means that they struggle in one content area; for example, they struggle at math computation but excel in English comprehension.

The group of six students who did not receive intervention are qualified for SPED with mild to moderate disabilities similar to the intervention group. However, they are placed in Guided Study Halls without one-on-one and small-group support. The school counselors predetermined both groups of students' Guided Study placements based on each individual’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and their level of needed support. An IEP is created based on a student's need for support at school.

**Methods and Materials**

For this project, the materials used included: printable weekly planners, a digital planner, and a PowerPoint presentation. Digital planners, Appendix A, and physical planners, Appendix B, were available to students based on their preferences. Giving students a choice in their learning is a teaching strategy that increases student participation. The PowerPoint presentation contained five lessons of information. These lessons included: how to use a planner; what the positive impact is when planners are used consistently; how to ask for an extension on a deadline; how to avoid missing work; and time management strategies. One lesson was taught each day, at the beginning of class. Students were given direct instruction on the topic and then were allowed to practice the skill. The lessons were created by me, but the content referenced from *Teaching Self-regulation: Seventy-five Instructional Activities to Foster Independent, Proactive Students, Grades 6-12* (Gaumer & Noonan, 2021).

One lesson was taught each day, for five days. Every lesson started with an introduction of the content, students were prompted with a question, reviewed content from the day before, or
asked to share experiences they have had based on a topic or situation. Next, the main topic of the lesson would be explicitly taught; students would receive steps or an outline on how to use a planner or complete a related topic. Then, students would have a chance to practice the skills they had just learned and ask questions. Students would work with a peer or independently and were given many opportunities to ask questions. Regular check-ins were used to solidify students' understanding and progress in learning. Finally, students would fill out their planners before starting any other work they brought with them. Typically a lesson would take ten to fifteen minutes at the beginning of the 50-minute class period.

To support students during the lessons visuals, graphic organizers, video, and applicable examples and practice were used. The lessons were broken down into simple parts over a school week to help students grasp simple parts at a time. The PowerPoint presentations were simple with only the necessary information, to keep a manageable amount of information for students. However, the slides were equipped with videos, pictures, and diagrams to support visual learning.

Data Analysis

Data was taken from the suburban middle school's grade book, Synergy. Data was recorded at seven thirty in the morning every school day before, during, and after the intervention. The number of missing assignments was counted and graphed at this time. This allowed the data to reflect the impact the intervention had throughout the study. Data tracking is a good assessment because daily records can be used to compare two factors against each other over time (Parma et al, 2009). Data taken before gave a baseline to assess success in the application of the skills taught.
The grade book relies on teachers' frequency of updating grades. Due to this, some data points may be misleading. For example, some assignments were shown as missing for multiple days after the student had turned in said assignment. Moreover, some teachers only updated grades on a certain day of the week. However, the decrease in missing assignments per week shows a good indication of the success of the intervention regardless of the possible data disruption.

Each graph, Figure 1 and Figure 2, was divided into three sections. In section one, week one, no intervention took place. The average for the nine students who would receive intervention in this section was five missing assignments in one week. For students who would not receive intervention, their average was three missing assignments during one week. In section two, week two, there is a noticeable downward trend in the amount of missing work with the implementation of intervention; the average of missing this week is four. For students who did not receive intervention, it is observed that their graph trends continue upward with five missing assignments a week. Students who did not receive intervention continued to accumulate missing assignments while those who did receive intervention showed progress in turning assignments in on time. Section three, week three, shows the effectiveness of using a planner each day with the average missing assignments is two. This is a 46 percent decrease in missing assignments per week. All students who received the intervention made progress, though some students showed more progress than others, this will be further discussed below. Based on the results, students who received the intervention on using a planner effectively were more successful with turning in assignments on time.
Results

**Figure 1:** Students Who Received Intervention

*Note.* Figure 1 shows the results of missing assignments tracked over three weeks for students who received intervention. The 1/29 through 2/2 shows data before the intervention, 2/5 through 2/9 shows data during the intervention, and 2/12 through 2/16 shows data intervention took place. Names are replaced with pseudonyms to protect students.
**Figure 2**: Comparative Data

**Note.** Figure 2 shows the results of missing assignments tracked over three weeks for students who did not receive intervention. The 1/29 through 2/2 shows data before the intervention, 2/5 through 2/9 shows data during the intervention, and 2/12 through 2/16 shows data intervention took place. Names are replaced with pseudonyms to protect students.

**Discussion**

The results of this study show the importance of why students need to be taught skills such as self-regulation to be successful in every aspect of their academic, personal, and professional lives. Sometimes, as teachers, it is difficult not to assume that students have the skills we expect them to have. It can be frustrating for teachers to have students miss assignments and work because of the lack of planning and organization. It is our responsibility to teach students the skills that we need them to have in the classroom as well as in the world. The effectiveness of the intervention suggests that incorporating explicit instruction in self-regulation
strategies is beneficial for meeting student needs. With this effectiveness, it would be worthwhile to look into other self-regulation skills that students struggle with to implement instruction in those areas as well.

For SPED students in particular, these results show the impact of a targeted intervention such as the one conducted on the growth of student skills. Students were taught skills to increase self-regulation and executive skills of planning ahead with the use of a planner, and their success went up in other areas as well. Grades increase because of the increased amount of work turned in. There was more time for students to take a break because of the lack of a to-do list. There could be a linkage between the intervention and students going up in other areas but this needs to be further investigated.

Moreover, teaching self-regulation and executive skills fosters students’ increase in successful independence. Students are only allowed to stay in public schools until they are twenty-one years of age. After that time is up, students are expected to be part of society. Therefore, they must have the skills to function as a 21-year-old would require. Practical skills are important because they are the basics of life.

**Conclusions**

Keeping track of assignments and deadlines is essential; neglecting these responsibilities can result in missed due dates and an accumulation of schoolwork. SPED students often struggle with organizational skills and require assistance in learning self-regulation techniques to achieve success. This study conducted at a suburban middle school in Nebraska focused on a group of eight students who received intervention on self-regulation skills, particularly about the use of a planner. The study spanned three weeks. It consisted of observation of missing assignments, targeted lessons on executive skills, and independent use of planners to support independence
and accountability. Data collected from the school's grade book recorded the impact of the intervention and showed success in meeting deadlines among students who received support.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Digital Planner Example
Appendix B: Printable Planner Example

Weekly Schedule

Class Of: [Blank Box]  Month: [Blank Box]

Monday [Blank Box]  Tuesday [Blank Box]  Wednesday [Blank Box]

Thursday [Blank Box]  Friday [Blank Box]  Saturday [Blank Box]

Notes: [Blank Box]
Appendix C: Practice Worksheet From Lesson Three: Planning to be late?

Hello _(_Mr./Mrs/Miss, Teachers name)_,

Can I please have an extension on __________? I need more time because_(_Honest Reason)_._ Can I have until ________? I apologize for the inconvenience, and appreciate your consideration.

Thank you,

_(_Name)_