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Teaching Students How to Fill Out Job Applications in a Special Education Classroom

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Teaching Students How to Fill Out Job Applications in a Special Education Classroom

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University Honors Capstone

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Senior Honors Project/Thesis

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Abstract

In this capstone project different instructional and assessment strategies were used during student instruction to help students see how to assist them in being able to fill out job applications. In the span of seven teaching days, five lessons on the subject and two testing periods are the duration of time spent on the unit. Starting with a Pretest and ending with the final assessment to see the progress made with the students.

Adjustments were made during instruction, and students were engaged in reflection to help the students' performance. The lesson was initially scheduled for 5 days of instruction, but data revealed from figure one showed that more was needed. Eventually, additional steps were taken to help guarantee the success of the students. The instructional strategy that was used was Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) and the assessment strategy was using concept maps. Both strategies were used to guide the students and allow them to be able to complete the task of filling out a job application independently.

Background

My clinical practice was completed with a suburban high school, and I was in the Alternate Curriculum Program (ACP) and was the special education teacher in this room. We had eight students in the classroom, each with various levels of ability. We had some of our students who were using assistive technology to communicate and other students who were perfectly fine with communication. These students were at distinct levels for the project, so we had to level the work based on their ability. This is something that our school did for ACP classrooms to make it, so each student had the chance to work with other students. It made the

ACP rooms feel like an inclusive community as well. Five of the students did identification cards and 3 of the students filled out whole job applications.

Introduction

Working with my collaborating teacher, we realized that the class that would be the best to do my research in would be Work Introduction Network (WIN), a class that helps introduce different jobs and vocational skills to students of all levels of special education at the high school level. When discussing with my teacher about the different materials we could go over, we realized that it would make the most sense for us to work in materials over applying for jobs because this is important in the work industry. Applying for jobs is the first step to furthering yourself and helping yourself have a chance in the work industry. This can be something a lot of our students struggle with so reviewing and helping them through it is something that will help. Some of these jobs that get them ready for the workplace are coffee carts, sorting items, folding clothes, helping run concessions stands, and other things that are practical in the work force. My teacher and I determined that a unit that would be good to add would be a job application process and teaching the students the different part for it and helping them understand and navigate through a job application on their own. Before any instruction took place, students were given a blank job application and were asked to fill out as much as possible for the pretest of this assignment. This would give us a baseline of information that the students know before they have instruction. This would also show me the instructor areas I could just review this information and check for understanding or areas where I might want to spend more time on. After reviewing this, I decided it would be best to use GRR and the idea of a concept map to be my strategies to help the students.

Instructional Strategies

Gradual Release of Responsibility

Gradual Release of Responsibility is an instructional strategy where you break down your lesson into four steps; I do (Teacher Models), We do (Full Group Instruction), You do Together (Paired up or working in groups), and You do Alone. Each one of these steps allows the students to slowly grow their independence to learning and grasping the materials on their own. This would make it so that the students can get through everything and ask the questions needed. It is normally done all in one lesson, but modifications can be made. This instructional strategy can be credited to Pearson and Gallagher in 1983. Other models like it came out before, but they came up with the name and model. The following articles are the ones that were found over GRR that I thought were useful and could help me with my research. The ones we will be looking at are *Synthesising the Flipped Classroom with the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model* by Marco Cimino (Cimino, 2018), *The Gradual Release of the Canonical Grasp: An Exercise in Excavation* by Rushek and MacDowell (Rushek & MacDowell, 2023), and finally, *Thirty-Five Years of the Gradual Release of Responsibility: Scaffolding Toward Complex and Responsive Teaching* by Sandra Webb (Webb et al., 2019).

Cimino (2018) demonstrate how to modify GRR in a classroom. This teacher used GRR but also did a flipped classroom approach. He noticed that it had a positive impact on students learning because they were able to come into the classroom knowing what he modeled. Cimino (2018) used the approach to shift items more to a responsibility that students could do at home for learning the information on their own, and it would be his job to clear up the confusion. He would have them watch videos of him modeling it and they were able to then come in and demonstrate their knowledge on their own. According to Cimino, “Differentiation occurs using the FGRR model when students watch the video at their own pace, students can watch the video

at their own speed, pause, rewind, and rewatch” (Cimino, 2018, p.42). This tells us that he feels that using a flipped classroom approach while doing GRR allowed students to do the modeling section at their own pace. This is why when we start to research study, we are doing each part of GRR as its own lesson. Helping the students go at a pace that makes sense to their level. Instead of rushing through something and only having them remember minimal information. This article helped show us how we can modify GRR to how it might help our classroom the most.

Rushek & MacDowell (2023) further demonstrated how GRR might look from the perspective of a teacher in an English Language Arts (ELA) classroom and they demonstrate how they can use GRR to get the students to dive in deeper and have more critical thinking over the topic they are going over. They were able to make sure the students were open for discussion and have vulnerable dialogue about what they were reading. Rushek & MacDowell (2023) were able to get their students to do this while reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee.

According to the authors, “However, the Critical ‘Aha!’ Moment is a realization that bridges theory and practice regarding understanding or “seeing” how power and privilege operate in the given context, and this realization sparks a desire for action, or as we have named it, a personal move in practice.” (Rushek & MacDowell, 2023, p.18). This tells us that the students needed to practice, and they needed to gather information from the students to make sure they were understanding it and could not just read the book without seeing where the students were at. Using GRR to determine student ability was helpful and allowed them to release the students as needed and allowed them to release the students when something small was happening or bringing the students together when something big was happening in the book. This article showed me that the students should be brought back together as needed and helped me realize that I could do this again when we started to make the concept maps as a whole group.

The third article by Sandra Webb (2019), in this article it talks about how GRR has evolved over time and how we use GRR in our classroom now. In this article Webb states; “Rather than viewing GRR as a lesson plan format that must be accomplished in daily lessons, we called for an expanded view of GRR as one of a variety of scaffolds.” (Webb et al., 2019, p.82). By this they mean that we should not just look at GRR as something that is used in every lesson and is one of the basics to lesson planning, but this is something that should be taken seriously and allow yourself to realize the importance to each step. When working with GRR it is important to make sure it fits the lesson and make sure the learners are engaged with it. Responding to the findings from this research, I made sure to keep the students engaged in separate ways with my lessons whether it was having them personalize parts of the lesson by showing the students their homes or having each student be able to help us by answering questions on the board. Separate ways by having them help us with various parts of the strategy that might be a bit slower.

Assessment Strategies

Graphic Organizer/Concept Map

This first article about graphic organizers is about students specifically in special education and it is about two diverse types of graphic organizers that the students had to fill out. The students fill out graphic organizers as they followed along with a presentation on this helped them grasp the information more verses a group of kids that did not have an organizer and just listened. Both groups were able to make effective progress so there was no proof that the organizer was more effective, but the writer Rüyâ Guzel Özmen says “In regard to filling the graphic organizers after reading, it is concluded from this study that the following factors were

associated with helping students recall the similarities and differences depicted in the texts.” (Ozmen, 2011, p. 790) This lets us know that the students might have had the same success as the students that did not use graphic organizers, but this helped me realize that this could be a good strategy to help my student with their test. It ended up helping my students and was a tool that they could use on their assessment.

The second article over graphic organizers was called “Changing Instruction to Increase Achievement for Students with Moderate to Severe Intellectual Disabilities” by Shawnee Wakeman, Meagan Karvonen, and Audra Ahumada (year?). They discussed different tools to use with students with disabilities and one of the tools they discuss is graphic organizers and they talk about how the teacher they are talking about could use graphic organizers to help his student better understand the information that they are going over. This article is more based on math but was one of few articles over graphic organizers that worked specifically with students with disabilities. They do mention how graphics can help facilitate how students with disabilities respond or understand something.

The final article I reviewed was about fourth graders who used a type of graphic organizer to help them write arguments. When looking at the before and after in this situation the students in the article by Wei, in the before we can see that the students had less components to an argument and they had fewer quality arguments. After using a graphic organizer to help them produce different sections for their argument and seeing how each item could build itself and add more detail would build into a bigger argument to help their case. This is something that I wanted my students to do when making the concept map. I wanted my students to see that various parts of their life could overlap, and you could go further, but for the context of the job application they did not need to do so. One example being address, zip code, city, state, and we

could have taken that further, but it was not needed. According to Wei, “Second, students’ GO response scores statistically significantly predicted their written argumentation scores for both quantity and quality and the relationship between GO response and written argumentation was sustained across genres after controlling for time.” (Wei, Firetto, & Murphy, 2019 p. 636). This article further suggests that the quality and the quantity of the items in the argument were better than before.

Goals and Objectives

The goal of the unit was for the student to fill out a job application with a little help from adults and help with using a concept map to guide them through the process. I wanted the students to be able to use this concept map in a real-life situation, so it was given to them and laminated to help them in future situations to use in real life applications. The way that we broke down GRR was different than usual we broke it down into each part was its own lesson and this made it so that we were able to take each section for GRR a little bit slower which helped with special education because it allowed me to take my time on each lesson and collect the necessary data to see how ready they were for each step.

The unit consisted of seven lessons, and it started with a pretest that had the students see how much of the job application they could fill out on their own. In lessons two through five, we went through each step of GRR, which made it so that we could see how much each student was taking away from each step. Then in lesson six we introduced the concept map to the students and had them make one of their own. Finally, we had the post-test and allowed the students to use the concept map to help them fill out the applications. During these lessons the students were able to show that they had been making real progress through different kinds of assessments like the I do alone section in GRR the students were able to show that they made progress by being

able to fill out more of the application then they were able to do so previously they just filled a lot of it out in the wrong sections.

Participants

The students that participated in this study were in 9th-12th grade at a suburban school and are in the ACP (Alternative Curriculum Program), and in this class, it had three students that completed the job application and five that filled out the identification card. This is a total of eight students with all of them being on IEP's and five out of the eight using assistive technology to help them communicate. Those five students were the ones who were filling out the identification cards. We also had two teachers and three paraeducators in the room to help each student more one on one.

Methods and Material

Day one students worked on the Job application (Appendix A) the first day on their own as a pretest to see where they were with the information given. This was to help give us a baseline to see the data that was needed for the rest of the unit.

The second day is when we started to dive into GRR. This is when we started with the I do phase of GRR. Starting with modeling and demonstrating each section of the job application process and using real life examples so the students could understand and connect to what we were doing. Instead of using my address or anything that they would not know I used the school's address and had something each student could connect to. Then we also used Google Earth to see that every building has its own unique address that makes it different. I also made sure to explain how an address is just showing a specific region of exactly where you live. Breaking down from State, City, Zip code, and the exact address. We used Google Earth to see each part of this and were able to zoom in and out to show the bigger picture to the students.

With more personal information such as birthday, school, age, and graduation year we looked these things up using the school's database, but for day two we ended up making up a student. With confidential information like social security, we did not have the students fill out this information since this was something we did not have access to. The final thing we did on day two was list some of the job's history, volunteer work, and references that the students could list. We gave examples like doing coffee cart in the classroom for job history. For volunteer work we gave the students the idea of ringing the bells or helping at a food shelter. The part that we really hit on here was the references, we described to the students that it would be best if the students used someone they were related to and that they used someone that they were close with. The examples we gave the students were teachers, coaches, and others in leadership positions for you.

Day three looked like day two except everything was pushed more towards the students taking the steps to lead the activity. Instead of having myself walk through and give the answers to each section of the job application I had the students help me work through it and I was able to make sure all eight of the students were able to help me through this by asking some of the questions I knew my three students already knew for the other five. As we walked through each section with them leading me through it. I had the students tell me the answers as they applied to them. I made sure we had all the information available to the students, and this helped them write it down and would hopefully help them more for day four and five when they do it more independently.

Day four the students were expected to work in groups, but the nice part about having five adults in the room is we are able to work more one on one with these groups and make sure that they are filling out the information properly and giving them the help that is needed right

away and not letting them get too far with a mistake. I helped more with students that I saw were struggling and let them ask questions geared towards each section. Then the students that I thought were doing better were able to work with the paras and the other teacher, but I also walked around the classroom to gather information from each group. The fifth day was supposed to be the last day, and this is when I had the students fill out the whole application on their own with minimal help from all adults in the room.

Figure 1

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Pretest and gathering of background knowledge	Modeling and I do step of GRR	Working with students or the We do step to GRR	Students working in groups or the you do together part of GRR	Students worked independently or the you do alone part of GRR Post-test one	Gathered more information and realized we should build concept maps to assist the students	Final post-test with concept map assistance

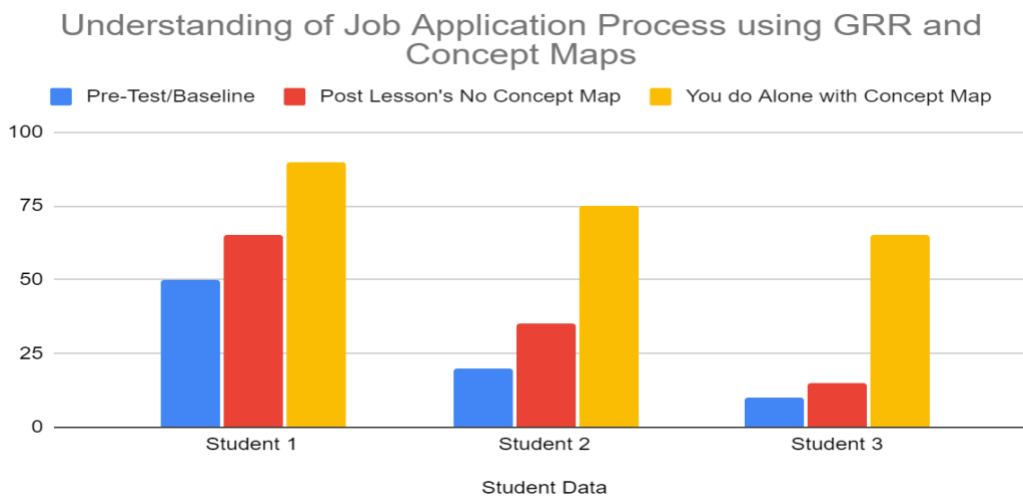
Having the students fill out the job applications on their own me how much improvement was made and allowed me to collect data after the baseline, but I noticed that my students knew more, but they filled it out in the wrong spots. Due to this, I made the decision to add two extra days to the unit and help them by making a concept map which would hopefully allow them to fully grasp and store the information for longer. Day six is when we made the concept map, and we labeled each section so the students could connect the dots and use this as a key to help them fill out the application correctly. A similar example to the concept maps we made is in Appendix B. We then laminated these concept maps so the students could keep them and use them for the

future when looking for jobs in their community. On day seven is when we had the students do the final test with the laminated concept maps.

Results

Figure 2

Test scores



Note: The information gather shows the percentage correct filled out of the application

Pre-Assessment

The pre-test showed that all three of the students tested knew 50% or less of the information that was needed for filling out the job application. With two out of the three students knowing less than 20% of what was on a job application. All the students tended to struggle when doing it independently.

Data Analysis

Post-Assessment with No Concept Map

When looking into the information of just using GRR we can see that all of the students still made improvements they just were less than what I was hoping for, but the students were

actually able to fill out more of the application it was getting it in the correct spot that the students seemed to struggle with more than anything. The students went from 50% to 65%, from 20% to 35%, and from 10% to 15%. The students would put the zip code into the phone number or the state in the city spot which if they had something that would help them be able to connect items together by match it would help them see how everything matched up. Each of the students helped us see that GRR was helpful, but in special education they might need something else to help them take the information to the next step. This is when we introduced the concept map.

Post Assessment with Concept Map

When using the concept map and looking back at figure 1, we can see that the students made a major jump when connecting the information from one place to another. They were able to see everything on one sheet and it helped guide them through the sheets. When looking at all the data all three of the students were able to fill out more than 50% of the information, which was high at the beginning. Now the low was 65% and the high was 90% for information that was filled out correctly.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study's purpose was to see how GRR and concept maps would help students in special education fill out a job application. Overall, I would say that both were successful. I think that in the future if I were to use GRR again in my classroom, I would make sure to have a tool to help the students like I ended up using in the end. Compared to the literature reviews, I think this shows that with special education students the idea of GRR must be altered in a couple of ways or assisted for students in an ACP classroom to be successful with it. The idea of a concept map when looking at the articles was very successful in my special education classroom. The place where I saw the least amount of improvement compared to the articles was in GRR, GRR

had a big positive impact on the students in the articles and we saw very minimal change. While it was positive change, it happened to be minimal compare to the articles. For my students we saw improvement, but it was incremental. Now the area where I saw the biggest similarities would be between the concept map and the graphic organizers and it showed me that these tend to help students to break down tasks and get to know more about the information. I did like breaking down each step of GRR and putting it into its own lesson, it made it, so the students were able to focus on the item at task that day. It also made it so that all questions the students had could be answered and we could slowly go over individual sections where I noticed struggle from the students. Regarding my capstone project, I will continue to use both strategies in my future classroom and will hopefully continue to grow more comfortable with them as I go on as an educator. Both had a positive impact on student performance in the end.

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Appendix A

Job Application

Personal Resume
 Transition Passport / Vocational / Resumes

Introducing...

Insert Photo Here

Address: _____

Phone #: _____ - _____ - _____

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Personal Resume
 Transition Passport / Vocational / Resumes

Name: _____
First Middle Last

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____

Zip Code: _____

Phone #: (Home) _____ - _____ - _____
 (Cell) _____ - _____ - _____

Age: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Social Security Number: _____ - _____ - _____

School Attended: _____

Date Graduated: _____

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Personal Resume
 Transition Passport / Vocational / Resumes

Work Experience:

Employer	From	To
_____	_____	_____

Volunteer Experiences:

Business	Job Tasks	Date
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

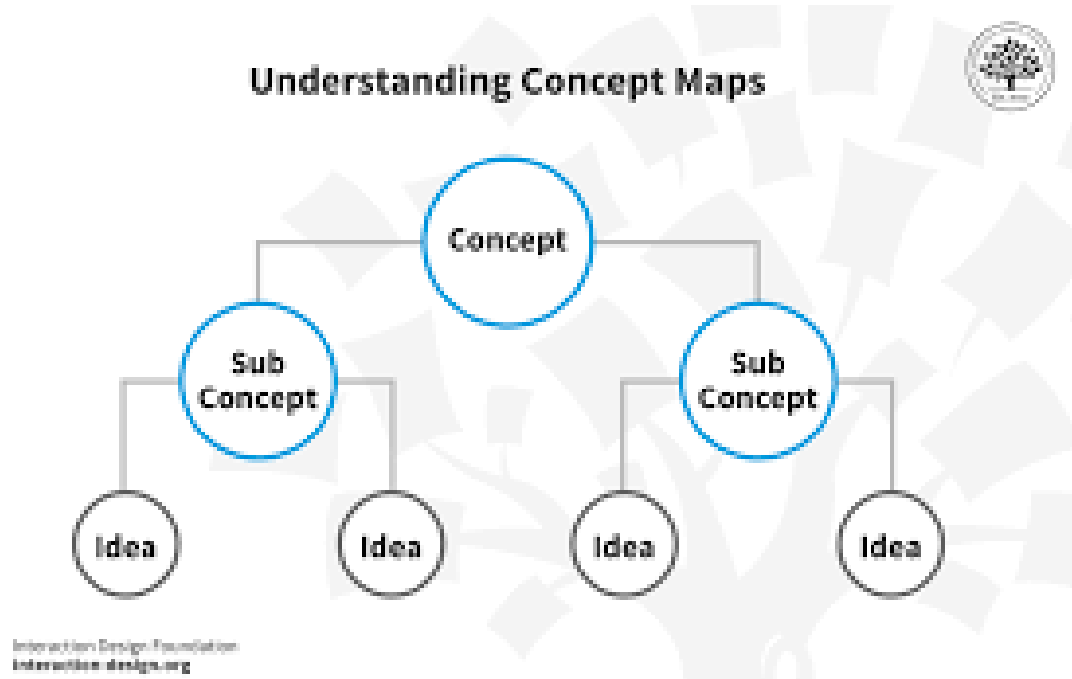
References:

Name	Relationship	Telephone #
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

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Appendix B

Concept Map Example



*Could not use real example due to student privacy