Madison Bowles

Learning Disabilities Strategy

**Name of the Article:** Literature Circles for Students With Learning Disabilities

**Population:** Students with learning disabilities.

**Objective:** Students will participate in small group literature circles, experience growth in both oral and written language skills, improve literacy skills, and engage with students of all levels of reading abilities.

**Age/Grade Level:** Elementary age to 12th grade

**Procedure:**

**Introduction**

This article discusses the purpose of using literature circles when analyzing books and novels, while highlighting the benefits of these literature circles for students with learning disabilities. A literature circle is a classroom instructional strategy that combines students with varied levels of reading achievement with the goal of encouraging maximum opportunities for student involvement for all members of a class. There are five steps outlined in the article that guide teachers in organizing and exercising successful literature circle experiences for all students, with keen concentration on how to implement literature circles for maximum benefit to students with learning disabilities.

**Summary**

Literature circles aim to give students the opportunity to teach themselves and learn from their peers, so it is imperative that teachers be facilitators of the literature circles, but not instructors of them. The article outlines five key steps for teachers to follow to make sure that students are prepared for literature circles and actively engaging in the conversation and activities. The first step involves the author and/or book selection. The teacher can choose one author and a few of their books for the groups to choose from, or the teacher can decide for the entire class to read the same book. In the latter case, teachers can allow the class to vote on the book they would like to read, or the teacher may just select for them. It is important that the books that are chosen to be analyzed and the activity that occurs in literature circles align with curriculum standards, and are appropriate for the age/grade level. Sometimes a teacher may wish to create a presentation of the book options before they are assigned, but other times a teacher may not give a presentation because the book has already been chosen. Students are put into groups of four or five, depending on class size. These groups must never be created based upon reading ability; they must be heterogeneous to allow students of all abilities to interact with each other. Step two is to select each group member’s role in the literature circle, and for the teacher to model each role. According to the article, four basic roles of students participating in literature circles are Connector, Questioner, Literary Luminary, and Illustrator. Other roles may or may not be limited to Timeliner/Historian, Word Wizard, Discussion Leader, Character Sketcher, Setting Locator, Plot Person, Art Director and Summarizer. For students with learning disabilities, the roles of Character Sketcher and Word Wizard may be particularly important in aiding to develop comprehension and vocabulary. Before the students begin the tasks of their roles, the teacher should take a passage of the book and briefly model each role. The teacher will also decide whether the roles will stay consistent for a period, or rotate each day. The third step is assigning and supporting the reading. Teachers will decide the amount of reading to be assigned that is determined by the grade level and the difficulty of the text being read. It may be beneficial to set aside in-class reading time if the teacher cannot count on students doing the reading as homework. In-class reading time will also give the opportunity for students with learning disabilities to ask questions and further prepare themselves for the upcoming literature circle class. Students with learning disabilities may need accommodations to provide reading support that allows maximum participation. These accommodations may include e-books, text-to-speech software, or books on CD. The fourth step is for teachers to use a role sheet and implement activities to expand each student’s role. Task role sheets should eventually be replaced with more creative role tasks that engage students farther. Tasks should be direct in instruction, but have room for interpretation and discussion. Teachers in higher grade levels may wish to use student reading journals for students to record their literature circle activity, instead of filling out a role sheet and crossing off tasks. Step five is the assessment. Teachers should develop rubrics and assessment grids to track students’ progress and to make sure they are understanding the required content. Reading quizzes and pre/post tests may also be used to assess content knowledge. The successful completion of a literature circle will result in students with learning disabilities engaging and participating in collaboration among other class members. Students with learning disabilities and other struggling readers may also have developed a new appreciation for literacy.

**Possible Adaptations:** In my general education English classroom, I plan on using literature circles so that my students will be able to collaborate with each other to better understand the books we will be reading throughout the year. Because this article is from 2008, it does not refer to the most current technology available to students who need accommodations. Many schools have invested in iPads and hi-tech laptops, among other new technology devices. These devices provide access to new, highly researched and adapted software that provides exceptional assistance for students with learning disabilities that they did not have access to years ago. I think this strategy would work well in my classes for summer reading assignments that most high schools require students to complete. Once students return to school after their summer break, they will have finished reading at least one, if not multiple books. I can have students pick their favorite book out of the ones they were assigned to read, and divide the class into literature circles based on the books of choice. This way, I can apply step one of the process by offering a selection of books and having the students choose which one they would prefer to analyze and discuss. I believe that in this situation, students with learning disabilities would feel more comfortable in my class at the beginning of the year because they will be starting the year discussing something they personally enjoy, rather than having to dive into something brand new. Because this strategy is not solely focused on assisting students with learning disabilities, I believe that students of all reading abilities will benefit, and the students with learning disabilities will feel included instead of singled-out.

**Reflection**: Overall, I really love this strategy because of the many benefits it brings for students with learning disabilities, as well as for students of all levels of reading abilities. Before investing my time in analyzing this article, it had never really occurred to me how beneficial literature circles and small group discussions can be for a student with a learning disability. These students often struggle with reading accurately, thinking and comprehending material, listening, speaking, and writing. From what I understand from the article and my own experiences, literature circles can provide a comfortable and non-intimidating atmosphere for students with learning disabilities to further their understanding of an assigned text. To me, the most helpful part about this strategy of learning and engaging is the variety of roles that a student may take on. I like that teachers can highlight the strong points of a student with learning disabilities and assign them a role that they can succeed in, all while providing the opportunity for all students to engage in peer-instruction and increase their self-determination.

**Research:** The author sites numerous facts and statistics regarding the level of implementation and success of literature circles throughout the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. As stated by the author, research has shown that teachers of students with learning disabilities who have incorporated the use of literature circles in their classrooms have found “promising” results that are outlined and explained throughout the article.

**Reference**

Anderson, P. L., & Corbett, L. (2008). Literature circles for students with learning disabilities. *Intervention in School and Clinic,* 44(1), 25-33. doi: 10.1177/1053451208318681