Cassie Felder

Learning Disabilities Strategy

**Name of the Article:** “Literature Circles for Students with Learning Disabilities”

**Population:** Students with learning disabilities who lack the confidence to participate in large-group discussions

**Objective:** The article offers a five-step procedure for teachers to include “literature circles” to encourage student-led discussion and critical thinking of texts by students with learning disabilities in small groups.

**Age/Grade Level:** elementary and secondary education

**Procedure:**

The authors of this article provide concrete and practical steps to aid teachers in creating small, focused, and heterogeneous groups in order to help students learn and engage with their readings. They call this approach “literature circles” and group students by differing reading levels and common interests so that students can learn from one another and see different perspectives in smaller groups. This approach is one that is most commonly utilized in general education classrooms that do not include children with learning disabilities, but, according to the authors, more general education and special education teachers teaching students with learning disabilities find literature circles to benefit students in their reading comprehension, public speaking, and critical thinking skills.

The authors recommend this approach specifically for students with learn disabilities because they typically have lower levels of reading comprehension and therefore, they are less likely to speak up in a big classroom. Literature circles encourage every student to participate because the groups are small and heterogeneous. Students choose the book they want to read and discuss and are grouped accordingly. They then, with some teacher facilitation, lead the discussion themselves, with every student encouraged to demonstrate his or her understanding.

The authors provide five steps for teachers to follow to create literature circles and ensure they reach their full potential. The first step calls for teachers to choose a topic and an author, under which are several book options from which students choose. Four to six is the recommended number of students for each group. The second step recommends that each student be assigned a specific role within the group to limit competition and encourage discussion and interest. Some roles are *connector*, *questioner*, *luminary*, *illustrator*, *timeliner*, *character sketcher*, *word wizard*, and more. With specific roles, each student has a job to perform and something to bring to the discussion. Step three gives teachers ideas on how to accommodate for students in terms of access to texts by providing books on tape, printed versions, and achievable assigned readings. The fourth step gives examples of how teachers can utilize roles and activities to encourage discussion, critical thinking, and collaboration between students. The fifth and final step is assessment. The authors advise having students create a portfolio of their learning activities to assess how they completed their roles, participated, and engaged with their classmates and materials.

**Possible Adaptations:** This approach can be utilized in both special and general education classes as a means to encourage students to learn from each other and see things from different perspectives. This method aids in collaboration between students of different reading levels, a trait found in the general education and special education classrooms, as it gives a voice and a role to each student. Through this, no one student can control the conversation, and students who lack confidence in their reading comprehension can have the courage to ask questions, learn from their peers, and accomplish a specific goal. It can work in classes of all grade levels with varying roles and activities to encourage students to think deeply about what they are reading.

**Reflection:** I agree with the authors’ attempts to include students of all reading levels, especially those with learning disabilities, in class discussion and activities. Rather than allowing students with higher levels of reading comprehension and critical thinking skills to dominate the conversation or lecturing on texts of which students may not have a great understanding, I can break my students up into small groups in which they teach each other what they have learned from the text and show each other different perspectives. With specific roles for each group member, every student, no matter how shy or unsure, has a job that must be completed and addressed, giving each student a voice.

**Research:** The authors take an existing teaching approach, “literature circles,” and show how this general education approach to small group discussion of literature can be adapted for students with learning disabilities. By providing examples of students’ work and responses to this approach, the authors show the benefits to this instructional method.

**Reference**

Anderson, P. L., & Corbett, L. (2008). Literature circles for students with learning

disabilities. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 44*(1), 25-33.