

Panel Presentation

Title: The Impact of Cognitive Process Models for Writing in a Social Context

Impact of a Social Constructivist Approach to Writing on the Core Deficits of Autism Spectrum Disorder

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This presentation, based on a larger study into the writing process of individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), details the effects of a socially oriented approach to writing for one school-aged individual diagnosed with ASD. The purpose of this presentation is twofold. First, this presentation will provide a detailed explication of relevant compensatory adaptations employed by this individual with ASD during the writing process. These systematic adaptations emerged as a result of his individual core cognitive deficits associated with ASD and allowed him a level of functionality within the writing process. Secondly, this presentation will show in detail the functional and systematic changes to those core cognitive deficits of ASD and their manifested compensatory adaptations as a result of a social orientation to the writing process, specifically shared writing. The situated context of shared writing allowed this individual with ASD to engage in socially oriented writing events for authentic purposes. These writing events were facilitated by a more experienced writing partner (i.e., graduate level clinician) in order to expand upon the social and communicative aspects of writing as a broadened form of social interaction. Patterns associated with the writing process and product will be discussed in order to fully explicate the effects of this social model of writing development on this individual's core deficits of ASD.

The data presented here is part of a larger qualitative investigation into the writing process of individuals with ASD. This investigation took place over an 11 month period and focused on the effects of a social constructivist approach to the development of social interaction through writing. This developmental approach, referred to as shared writing, uses the apprenticeship model of pedagogy allowing more experienced writers to guide the novice writer through the functional use of the writing process for social interaction. Using qualitative methodology, the effects of this approach on the social and functional aspects of the shared writing process were analyzed in light of the rich and complex manifestations of the core deficits of ASD. This presentation focuses, in-depth, on one of the participants from this investigation and the functional, systematic changes to his orientation to the writing process and social interaction as a result of this social orientation to writing development.

These emerging systematic and functional compensatory adaptations to the social demands of the writing process will be discussed in light of the core cognitive deficits used in defining and diagnosing all ASDs. Emergent characteristics of a changing system adapting to the demands of these social events will be detailed and discussed as part of the functional compensatory adaptations developed throughout the investigation. These adaptations were systematic in

execution and served a variety of functions during the writing process, but also indicated clearly aspects of cognitive understanding or growth as a consequence of the social approach employed in this investigation.