Katy Szalay Lori Gibson, M.A. ED536U Autism Puzzle 6-16-17 500 Level Assignment: Autism Puzzle #8-A

For our last writing assignment of the school year, creating an informational a Google Slide Show, I utilized the TEACCH curriculum to create a learning and working environment that was “autism-friendly.” I wanted to create a lesson that took advantage of how my student with high-functioning autism learned best (technology) and help his limitation (organized writing) strengthen.

Since my student with autism can utilize text-based checklists, I created one for him as well as for all of my learners. The checklist had ten steps we were going to take in the writing process. For all of my students, I created color-coded pages for each handwritten step so that everything would be organized. At the end of each instructional day, the pages would go into the “turn in basket” at the back of the room.

Day 1. The first item on the checklist and first page (blue) was for our “research.” The students were given Chrome Books to research their chosen topic about a place or event in Missoula (our community). The kids received 3 pieces of lined, blue paper with bullets. The students were to write down at least 10 (or more) bulleted notes about their research topic. All notes were to be written in complete sentences. Anytime my students have been able to research freely, they do so with ease and enthusiasm. They also enjoy helping each other when someone experiences a struggle.

Day 2. Students were given their blue pages from the day before as we began our ELA block. The second item on the checklist was “highlight and brainstorm format.” The students were then given a second paper (green) for this step. Their job was to highlight all bulleted notes they were hoping to use in their informational writing on their blue pages. Then, they were to brainstorm how they would format their slides with titles, images, and text or sentences. Their green papers had four rectangles on each side to represent the slides. At the end of our work time, the kids were provided a binder clip to connect their blue and green papers and turn them in.

Day 3. The third step of the checklist was to create first draft for each slide. Yellow papers with two large rectangles on each side were passed to the kids, along with their clipped pages from day two. The kids were instructed, verbally and text-based via their checklists, to take their highlighted information, put it into their own words, and write at least two complete sentences on each slide, complete with titles. Their “brainstorm format” slides were to also serve as guides for each slide. When these were complete, students clipped all three papers together and turned them in.

Day 4. The fourth item on the checklist was a refresher on Google Slides (text typing, image dragging and copying, and fonts), and a fifth item was to create text-only slides. Students were all given Chrome Books and an opportunity to practice before we began. They were then given their clipped papers, but instructed to use their green “brainstorm format” and yellow pages with their first drafts of their slides. The students were informed that the rule was to type up their slides, focusing on getting text on each slide. When they were finished, they needed to review each slide and spell check.

Day 5. The fifth, sixth, and seventh parts of the check list was to add images, adjust fonts, and choose a background. Students were also given an eight option to add transitions between their slides if they wished. However, this was a challenge piece as it was not explicitly taught to them.

Day 6. The ninth and tenth items on the checklist were to practice and present their slideshows.

My take-away from this lesson was that having each step highly structured and explicitly written and organized into color-coded papers helped not only my autistic child but also my intensive and nearing-proficient students. All appeared to have less anxiety about the learning process. The teaching intensity was also high enough to keep each child engaged with the materials. Since the assignment was of high-interest for most kids, it allowed me to intervene with students who got stuck and prompt those who needed it. The format in which our last informational writing piece was structured allowed for both guided and independent learning. When I asked the students what their thoughts were on our final writing assignment, they said it was “easy” because everything was so organized. They knew what each step would entail and all of their work was organized and did not get lost. The kids also enjoyed working with computers to publish their final products rather than just writing it on paper. My student with autism said this was an easier way for him to write because he could add pictures and color and it was a topic he was interested in (The Missoula Train Depot). If I could improve this lesson, I would have liked to have more para support to help me in guiding and prompting. I often found myself spending more time with some kids than others, and the “others” tried to persevere and figure things out, but really needed some one-on-one assistance. The class, as whole, helped one another, as some are more proficient in certain areas of Google than others. This aspect was quite helpful. All in all, I felt the lesson was successful. The assignment was tailored to each student’s unique learning, organization, and presentation style.