

Overcoming difficulties with written expression

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a lifelong neurodevelopmental disorder which affects at least 1 in 100 Australian children. Many children on the autism spectrum struggle with the fine motor and perceptual skills required for handwriting, and the conceptual and language skills required for written composition. They therefore often need specialist intervention to assist them with written expression so that they can succeed academically. The purpose of this research is to support students on the spectrum to improve their writing outcomes. Both the use of assistive technology (AT), such as word processing software, and an explicit writing strategy instruction known as Self-regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) have been shown to be effective in improving writing outcomes for children on the spectrum. These interventions have not been used in combination in general education classrooms however and neither of these interventions have previously been used to support inclusion. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an approach involving the design of classrooms and programs from the outset to accommodate diverse learners, rather than using strategies or interventions that segregate students with special needs from the rest of the class. This research will develop and test a novel writing intervention that draws on the principles of UDL, by combining AT and SRSD introduced to the students through a peer-based Video Modelling (VM) technique. Video Modelling has been shown to be an effective learning strategy for students on the spectrum but is also suitable for the whole class. A series of multiple single subject experimental design (ABAC) studies will be conducted to compare the student's written compositions in terms of quality and length of production when handwriting, using AT alone, and using AT in combination with SRSD or handwriting. The proposed research will examine the efficacy of using this novel writing intervention to improve written outcomes for children on the spectrum in inclusive general education classrooms.