

TEC Podcast #2 Cindy Sherman and Susan De La Paz, "FIX: A Strategic Approach to Writing and Revision for Students With Learning Disabilities," *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 48(2), pp. 93–101.

Lorraine: Welcome to this *TEACHING Exceptional Children* podcast. I'm Lorraine Sobson, Publications Manager at the Council for Exceptional Children. Today I'm speaking with Cindy Sherman, a speech language pathologist at Haynes Public Charter School in Washington, DC, and Susan De La Paz, an associate professor of special education at the University of Maryland.

Cindy and Susan have an article in a recent issue of TEC entitled "FIX: A Strategic Approach to Writing and Revision for Students With Learning Disabilities."

Thanks so much for joining me.

Susan: I'm happy to be here. Thanks for asking us.

Cindy: Yes, thanks so much.

Lorraine: I'm delighted to have you both with me today. Susan, I'm going to start with you. In the article, you note that research shows that when novice writers revise their work, they tend to make *more* changes rather than *better* changes. Could you explain what you mean by this distinction?

Susan: That's a really great question. One of the things that researchers and teachers have noticed for a long time is that young and struggling writers tend to focus on surface changes, which are superficial. They focus on things like punctuation, spelling, word choice, sometimes grammatical changes that don't really affect the overall quality of what they're doing. They tend to do a lot of those without having a real impact.

Lorraine: The acronym ... FIX ... stands for **F**ocus on essay elements, **I**dentify problems, and **E**xecute changes, and you mention that FIX helps students attend to both the surface level, like you just mentioned, and the "big picture." How does that combination help students become better writers?

Susan: That's a really great question again, but it's actually going to take me a little bit into theory to unpack. Hopefully, readers will forgive me and hang in there for a minute or two. The strategy that you just walked through really was developed from and an outgrowth of research that was started in the 1980s by a team called Scardamalia and Bereiter, then Steve Graham in 1997, myself working with Steve and another researcher, Phil Swanson, in the late '90s. We all were working with the idea of how do we look at the underlying cognitive processing that was going on when novice and struggling writers were trying to revise their papers?

What people tried to do was to come up with different procedures prompting aspects that we could do to change the focus from that service level. The FIX strategy—it prompts students to really focus on the genre, the essay—for example if it's an expository essay, for the main parts, the big elements, and the quality of those big parts. If it's a story, kids are asked to write stories, what are the parts for each aspect of the story? We're focusing on that first and then, after kids really think about that big picture, going back to look at the remaining problems that were in the composition, the text that they had framed, in a second pass through the paper. FIX will really help kids coordinate each of those actions, the big picture first and then going to the more surface-level problems.

Lorraine: Thanks, Susan. Cindy, I'm wondering if you can sort of unpack it just a little bit further by talking about the three different steps.

Cindy: The first step of FIX uses the red card to focus on essay elements, if you're working on expository essay, or story parts, if you're working on a narrative or a story. Students are given a red FIX card with self-statements that include a series of prompts such as: Do I have a thesis statement? Do I have enough reasons? Did I elaborate? Self-statements for stories might include: Did I introduce my character? Did I describe the setting?

This part right here really gets the students to focus on the format of whether it's expository essay, persuasive essay, or story. It helps them use self-statements and decide whether they've got the basic format that's needed to even have a good essay or story.

Step 2 of FIX uses a yellow card and highlighters so students can go through sentence by sentence, and they identify problems in their story or in their essay. Self-statements might include: Did my introduction get my reader's attention? Does this sound right? Am I getting away from the main idea? And here, these can even individualize based on what students' needs are and their weaknesses.

Then from there, once you've identified problems, then you go to Step 3 of FIX, which uses the green card to execute changes such as adding, deleting, moving or rewriting text in order to make meaningful changes during the revision process. This is where we really tell students this doesn't mean just doing the superficial changes. This means adding text, deleting to really make meaningful changes that improve the quality of the essay or the story.

Lorraine: I'm glad you mentioned the color coding, Cindy, because one of the things I really like about the article in print is that there are graphics illustrating the role of the color coding and how it leads to more effective revision. That leads to another question.

Susan, one of the things that you both also stress is that it's a process for thinking about revision, not a writing program. Can you use FIX with any writing program or is there one or more that you would recommend?

Susan: You know, your questions are really making us hopefully clarify this for teachers. I wanted to just jump back and briefly explain that the color coding that Cindy was referring to. It's actually one other aspect of this whole process, this strategy instruction that's called the self-regulated strategy development—from Karen Harris and Steve Graham from over the years.

The color coding provides another layer of cues for kids because it's that stop light analogy. Teachers often use that for other reasons in their classroom, but the stop light, really the red, is saying, "Hey, stop that process. Stop that temptation to make those surface changes," and to go back, and the yellow is to be cautious, focus on those secondary changes, and then green is to go ahead and actually implement the changes. Just wanted to slip that in there.

But you are asking more generally about writing programs. This process or this strategy really can be used by teachers [with] the writing programs that they have in place. It can fit with commercial programs. It can fit with attempts to teach according to Common Core State Standards. The main take-away would be that we want students to be writing several times per week, hopefully for multiple purposes, have opportunities to make choices in the writing that they do, things like that. This process really just is folded into that overall writing program.

Lorraine: Susan, you mentioned that FIX is a self-regulated process that we're teaching them. Can you talk a little bit more about self-regulation and how learning these kind of strategies helps students?

Susan: Sure. There really are two types of self-regulation that are emphasized in FIX that help students manage the writing process. Self-statements are used first to problem-solve what to do when revising. Kids would say things like, "What is it that I have to do first?" The first step in FIX is to focus on essay elements, so I ask myself, "Does this essay have a premise? Does it answer the prompt? Do I have enough reasons?" All those kinds of questions that I just shared with you are about the process for making revisions, the quality of the revisions, and managing that overall process.

The second type of self-regulations statement that we embed is self-monitoring and self-reinforcement. Kids would say things like, "Well, I'm making better changes," or, "My grades are going up," or, "I'm able to use FIX and I like writing more than I used to before." Self-monitoring and self-reinforcement are some aspects of self-regulation that are especially important for kids with disabilities.

Lorraine: There's also an approach that you talk about when teaching students to use a self-regulated strategy, in this case FIX. In describing how teachers can present the instruction to the students, you talk about six stages. I'm not going to delve into all of them, but I do want to focus on a couple of the stages more specifically.

You were just talking about the self-statements that students make. The fourth stage of the strategy instruction requires memorization. I'd like to bounce this one to Cindy.

What are some strategies for helping students memorize both the steps of FIX and the self-statements, the metacognitive statements, that go with them?

Cindy: One of the things that we do is we review the mnemonics on a daily basis. Almost like a little mini lesson, you start every day reviewing the mnemonic. Whether it's the mnemonic we use for helping them plan when they have to go back, the revising—because it's a recursive process, they may have to go back and plan, perhaps using the mnemonic from there. Let's say with the FIX mnemonic, going through we introduce it again every day. We have them memorize the mnemonic, have them memorize and recite: What does the F stand for? What are the statements that are on the red card?

Same thing [when] they identify problems, execute changes. We're asking them to memorize the mnemonic, memorize the self-statements that are in each mnemonic, and then often times I'll give quizzes to students, just really short little quizzes, to help them be able to internalize this. Then also the students are practicing using the mnemonics and using the strategies until they have actually memorized and internalized the mnemonics and the self-statements and just really the overall writing process.

We provide a lot of guided instruction until they've memorized those steps. Many times these self-statements are very personal to what their needs are, so it's easier for them to remember what they need in the self-statement. It's just a lot of repetition and even giving them some quizzes to help them memorize that strategy.

Lorraine: I just love how this whole process transfers the control and the management from the teacher to the student, in particular the fifth stage when the teacher is teaching the process; it's called "supported," the fifth stage. How do teachers provide support for students to do revision but also encourage them to work independently?

Cindy: We give a lot of guided instruction until they have internalized the steps. It requires a lot of modeling, a lot of suggesting, self-statements for a particular process, suggesting self-regulated statements that they might use. As the students go through their writing process and the revising process, you actually begin to see where their weaknesses are and you call that to their attention and say, "You know what? This would be a good self-statement for you"; "This would be a good goal for you."

Many times you may have to model how to identify problems or model how to execute a change. It requires a lot of guided instruction through modeling, collaboration, and just assistance through using the actual FIX strategy and the mnemonics.

Lorraine: I like the way you describe that way of supporting students to really embed the process in their work. Then the last stage is "independent performance." The goal of that stage is to encourage students to be able to do this process without needing the prompts of the color-coded cards. How do you know when to pull away those supports?

Cindy: Good question. We set a certain criteria in for reaching independent performance that, first of all, includes memorization of the fixed mnemonics. They just know that by

memory. They don't need their cards anymore. They are able to memorize the self-statements on each card. Whether you're talking about—whatever genre it is, whether it's a story, a persuasive essay, or an expository essay they're explaining, they've memorized the self-statements on each card. They automatically know which essay elements or which story parts should be included in their essay. They also have an ability to include all the essay elements and story parts without using the red FIX card. They no longer need it anymore. They know which story parts they have to include. They have this ability to identify problems and execute changes in order to make at least five meaningful changes. That's the goal that we set: make at least five meaningful changes.

Usually, kids are making sometimes up to 10 to 15 changes, but that's the goal, to have them make at least five. Then, using at least five self-regulation statements throughout the writing process. Not only just the self-statements that are on the card but also self-regulation statements that are helping them monitor their progress through the writing process.

Lorraine: I just love talking about this because it just was such a fun article to read. You could really visualize it in the classroom. Susan, I wanted to ask you a little bit about how it's been used in classrooms and demonstrated because I know there's a 2013 research report in *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice* that was the basis for this later article geared to practitioners.

Susan: Sure. The strategy FIX was tested with multiple students who were sixth-graders and included kids who were English language learners, students with learning disabilities, as well as students who were low-, average-, and high-achieving writers. These were heterogeneous classes, so this instruction was tested with all of that mix, and a lot of people are going to be familiar with the multiple baseline design, multiple probe and multiple baseline design. We really wanted to make sure that this was something that really benefited kids in terms of the overall quality of their papers before we went out to say, "How could teachers actually implement this if they would like to?"

If anyone is interested in more information, they can go back and read some of those details. We're thrilled to have folks find out more about this. We feel like the FIX strategy, when taught as part of an overall writing program through the SRSD model of instruction, really is in some ways generic and can be helpful for kids at a lot of different ages. I don't know, Lorraine, if any of your listeners ever get a chance to give [feedback], but Cindy and I would love to know if teachers are using this, making other modifications, using it with older kids, and that kind of thing.

Thank you so much for asking us today to share some of this information with you.

Lorraine: I do love reading between the lines, and that's sort of what these podcasts let everybody do: sort of talk more about the things behind the scenes. Thank you again, both of you, so much for talking with me today.

Cindy: Thank you, Lorraine.

Susan: Thank you.

Lorraine: Cindy and Susan's article, "FIX: A Strategic Approach to Writing and Revision for Students With Learning Disabilities," is published in the November/December 2015 issue of *TEACHING Exceptional Children*. TEC is a publication of the Council for Exceptional Children. For more information about CEC, visit cec.sped.org.