

Supporting Neurodiverse Multilingual Learners With Academic Writing



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LEYSIN AMERICAN SCHOOL IN SWITZERLAND



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About Leysin American School (LAS)

Leysin American School in Switzerland is a boarding school in the Swiss Alps for students in grades 7-12.

By the Numbers



30

Athletic teams and clubs



75%

Of Students ride the bus for 20 min or less each day



14

STEAM courses offered in 2017-2018



100%

Of students love our cafeteria food



16

Nationalities represented by the student body



1:1

Connected campus



100%

Of graduates matriculate to four-year colleges



34

Outdoor clubs and after school programs



Research Questions

1. According to existing research, what strategies best support academic writing for neurodiverse multilingual learners?
2. What writing strategies do LAS teachers already use with 7-12th grade neurodiverse multilingual learners?



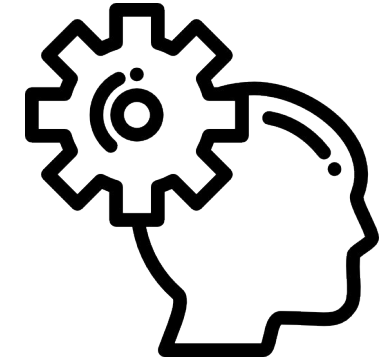
Literature Review

Neurodiverse multilingual learners are also referred to as English learners with exceptionalities (Honigsfeld & Cohan, 2024) or dually identified students ([Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#)). These students qualify for both English Language Development and Special Education services. They may have an Individual Education Plan, a Section 504 Plan and/or an Individual Language Acquisition Plan.

Many studies have addressed writing instruction for neurodiverse multilinguals. Effective instructional and learning strategies were gathered and collated into this [Academic Writing Observation Protocol](#) as the first step of this action research project.



Methodology



Step 1: Develop an [Academic Writing Observation Protocol](#) based on a literature review of learning and instructional strategies for neurodiverse and multilingual learners.



Step 2: Observe six classes in which neurodiverse and neurotypical multilinguals are engaged in writing tasks, and use Academic Writing Observation Protocol to identify teaching and learning strategies. Obtain [informed consent](#) from teachers before the observations.



Step 3: Collate notes from six observations using an open coding scheme where patterns are identified and grouped into major themes or topics (Troia & Maddox, 2004, p. 23).



Data Gathering Through Classroom Observation

Grade levels

Observed one 7/8th grade class, three 9/10th grade classes, one 11th grade class, one 12th grade class.

Content areas

Observed World History and English Language classes.

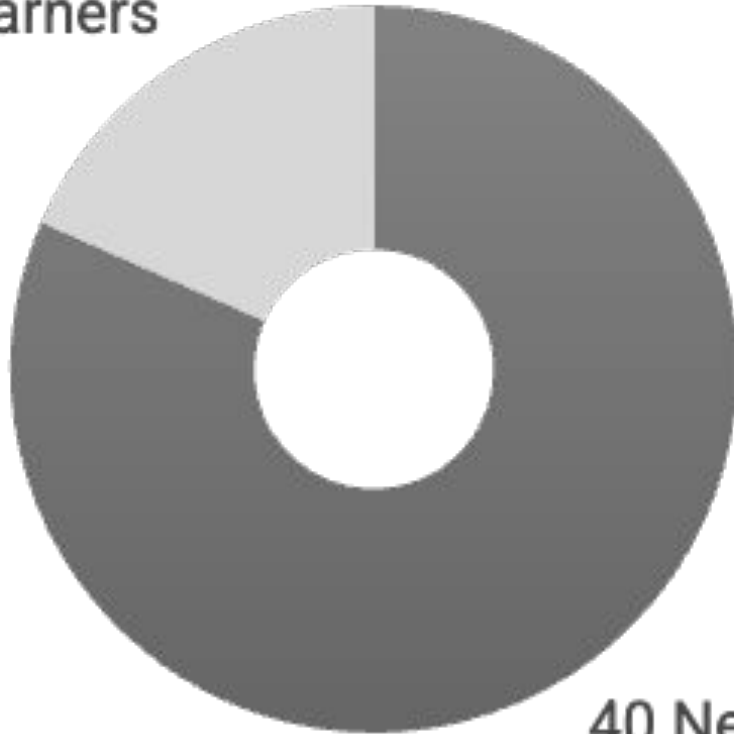
Observation time

Total observation time was 3.5 hours.



Distribution of Students Observed

9 Neurodiverse
Multilingual
Learners



40 Neurotypical
Multilingual
Learners

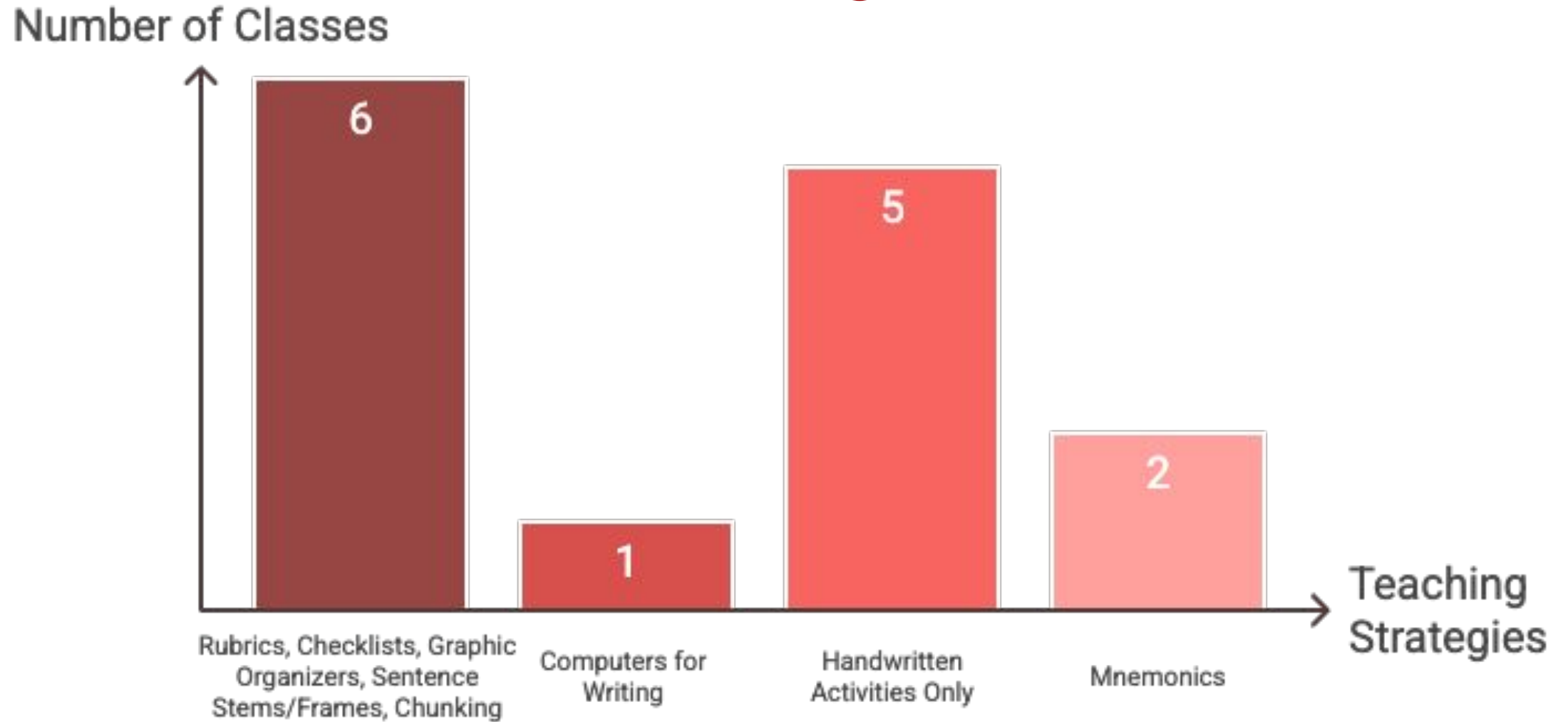
*neurodiverse=has an
Individualized Learning Plan*

*neurotypical=does not have
an Individualized Learning Plan*

*multilingual=acquiring English
through the English Language
Acquisition Program and/or
learning another language in
addition to English*



Findings



Teaching Strategies and Tools Usage



Discussion

Across the classes observed, teachers communicated clear expectations for writing outcomes through rubrics and checklists. Additionally, in all six classes, teachers parsed large writing task into smaller parts (i.e. chunking) and supported student writing through graphic organizers, mnemonics, and sentence stems/frames. Interestingly, no neurodiverse multilingual learners used learning strategies unless they were specifically prompted to do so, whereas all neurotypical multilingual learners exhibited self-regulatory behaviors and problem-solving strategies without prompting. These patterns across classes indicate the need for further research:

- To what extent are the most commonly-used instructional strategies supporting neurodiverse multilingual learners with their academic writing?
- Which of the [34 instructional strategies](#) that were not observed could be most effective in supporting neurodiverse multilingual learners?
- How can teachers encourage neurodiverse multilingual learners to use learning strategies independently?



5 Key Takeaways from Action Research



1

Formulate Initial Idea

Develop a starting point for research

2

Observe and Listen

Gather data through observation and listening

3

Revise Approach

Adjust research question and methods based on findings

4

Encourage Collaboration

Foster open communication and collaboration

5

Support Students

Implement strategies to support students



Looking Forward

May 14, 2025: Send a [survey](#) to 72 faculty members to examine how teachers believe they are already supporting academic writing for neurodiverse multilingual learners.

Next school year (2025-2026): Analyze the survey data, and choose one underutilized instructional strategy to pilot in three to five different classrooms. Measure the impact of this strategy through classroom observations, student surveys, and teacher interviews.

The continuation of this action research project will be supported by [LAS Educational Research \(LASER\)](#).



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