

Creative Writing

Teaching and Supporting Students on the Autism Spectrum

Creative writing tasks are often a trigger for heightened anxiety for those students on the autism spectrum. An abundant amount of skills are required, e.g. social imagination, language skills, decision making, auditory and visual memory, the organisation of thoughts into a logical sequence and order, grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Students with an ASC tend to be literal thinkers, which means that teaching abstract concepts needs to be done in a concrete way, this is typically accomplished through their experiences, interest and the use of visual aids. Additionally, such students, to varying extents, experience difficulties understanding the nature of social relationships (such as friendships) and in using appropriate and accurate language to describe feelings and emotions - core features of autism.

Consider the following strategies and approaches in supporting the development of creative writing skills for those students on the autism spectrum;

Use the student's special interests as a starting point and focus for writing assignments helping to engage and motivate them. Working within their experience will help to build confidence.

Reduce the demand on the student's auditory processing skills by utilising the VAK learning styles (three main sensory receivers) visual, auditory, kinaesthetic. See it, hear it, write / draw it to give the student the maximum opportunity to generate ideas, plan and produce their work.

'A picture is worth a thousand words.' For a struggling writer, a picture and a few key words will help get the ideas and sentence flowing.

Provide plenty of examples of story-openers and generate emotive and atmospheric vocabulary.

Base fictional characters on their own personality traits so they can consider how they would feel in certain situations. Remembering moments and experiences in their own life and then express them in a creative manner.

Include emotive music pieces, role-play and drama opportunities to help generate ideas, empathise with a character and begin to develop a vocabulary to support their writing.

Social stories may help their understanding of social situations and relationships.

Introduce and model the use of writing frames such as storyboards, mind maps, spider diagrams and story starters to guide planning and organisation in written tasks.

Try 'talking the story'. For younger students consider using puppets to generate and develop ideas and vocabulary plus support sequencing. Puppets can be simple self-made laminated pictures on sticks.

Build confidence as a writer by starting from the factual leading slowly into imaginative work, acknowledging that the student has written about something that *has actually happened* asking, "What would the ending have been if.....?"

Use a known story and encourage the student to change aspects of it to create their own version, so that the structure is provided for him/her.

Provide further ideas in the shape of interesting props, media clips, photo cards, real items which may capture his interest, provide a focus and nurture his engagement.

Planned opportunities for paired planning around writing tasks – this may reduce the pressure and support the student in generating ideas as a group with peers modelling to him/her.



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