A MAGALOG FOR **SCHOOLS** AND **HYBRID SCHOOLS**

# ARTS OF LANGUAGE

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# STRUCTURED SUCCESS

## Center Academy's students with specialized learning differences flourish with IEW's step-by-step methodology.

*by Jennifer Mauser*




Teacher of the Year **Amy Del Campo**

With each edition of the schools magalog *Arts of Language*, we enjoy spotlighting a teacher or administrator who has implemented with fidelity the Structure and Style method within his or her classroom or school. This year is no different. We are delighted to introduce you to Amy Del Campo, a middle school teacher for Center Academy located in Pinellas Park, Florida. First learning about IEW's Structure and Style writing method through her position at Center Academy, Amy has found IEW's instructional method to work very well for her students.

Center Academy has ten satellite locations spread throughout Florida. The school is a specialized full-day middle and high school developed specifically for students with specialized learning differences such as dyslexia, ADHD, or high-functioning autism. Students attending the school enjoy a smaller teacher-to-student ratio, which allows the teachers to accommodate each student's personal learning style.

**To learn more about Center Academy, scan the QR code or visit CenterAcademy.com**

**What is the mission and history of Center Academy?**

*The mission of Center Academy is to provide students with a learning environment that facilitates the development of self-confidence, motivation, and academic skills and gives students the opportunity to achieve success in life. Center Academy began in 1968 by Mack Hicks in hopes of creating a school for students with attention deficit disorder and neuropsychological difficulties. The academy has ten locations in the state of Florida, serving students with learning differences, including ADHD, dyslexia, autism spectrum disorder, dysgraphia, and other disabilities.*

**Tell us a bit about yourself and your position as a teacher at Center Academy.**

*My name is Amy Del Campo, and I have been teaching with Center Academy for twenty years. I have taught a variety of age groups, but I am currently teaching 7th and 8th grade. I have two children of my own, who are 10-year-old twin boys. I love spending time outdoors with them.*

**According to Center Academy's website, their focus is on teaching students with learning differences. How many students do you have in your class? What adjustments have you had to make to your writing instruction in order to make it work for your particular students?**

*I currently have nineteen students in my classroom. I do have to make some adjustments for the students. We often read the source text together and discuss the key words and vocabulary. I have also broken up some of the assignments into smaller segments to help the students focus on the content. We discuss the correct spelling of words, and I also add in grammar instruction. The students often work in pairs to edit each other's assignments. Discussing the topics and sentences orally often helps the students.*

**What are your goals for the English language arts program at Center Academy?**

*My goal for our writing/language program at Center Academy is to improve writing fluency, grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and reading comprehension. I would also like to encourage students to add more details and descriptive wording and to use correct punctuation in their writing.*

**Did you have any concerns initially about teaching your students to write? If yes, how did the Structure and Style writing method help to alleviate those concerns?**

*My main concern with teaching students to write is to be able to grab their attention in hopes that they will want to write. Many of my students have had bad experiences in the past when it comes to writing. They often do not know how to write complete sentences or use proper grammar techniques. The Structure and Style writing method breaks down the process, step by step, which helps the students to understand the concept. We work together in the beginning to understand the new concept. Cycling through the nine structural units and the stylistic techniques gives the students a better understanding of the writing process.*

**For your dyslexic learners, what steps did you take in order to mitigate the reading disability so that your students were freed to focus on their writing?**

*We discuss the source texts together and read over the paragraphs. We work together to create the key word outline and discuss the spelling of words. I encourage my students to highlight their source texts and outlines. The students will edit their rough draft with a partner. If a student has difficulty reading the text, I will help them with that. Then we break down the information together and go over the style.*



**This past year you taught using Structure and Style for Students as part of a pilot program. What were your experiences with your students as you moved through the curriculum?**

*When I first introduced the program to the students, I could tell they felt nervous. We watched the first video together and went over the binder, and they seemed interested. As we worked through the curriculum, the students were open to the topics. Many of them found success with the key word outlines and the process. They began to see improvement with their writing in all subject areas.*

**Outside of the writing process, what other types of growth did you notice in your students? For example, did you find that your students were able to build upon their executive function skills or expand their vocabulary or general knowledge?**

*Yes, many of the students are interested in the topics provided. They enjoy the different fables and scientific facts provided by the texts and use the knowledge provided in the source texts to expand on the topic. We often use the key word outlining method to take notes in science and history class. These methods help my students become better organized.*




**What did you notice in IEW's methodology that would help you teach your students according to their unique learning needs?**

*IEW's methodology was helpful in teaching the writing process to my students because of how structured and organized the program is. Each step in the program prepares the student by building a foundation in the writing process. The students learn new skills and then build on these skills. This methodology allows for individual pacing of the program based on each student's needs.*

*I use the checklist at the end of each lesson to help the students with their organizational skills. We review each aspect of the checklist before writing, and the students hand it in with the final product. This is very helpful to the students.*

*Additionally, I use the videos when introducing the lessons to the students. I break the videos up over the week to go along with different sections of the assignment. This is helpful for the students to take notes and to better understand each topic.*

**What sort of growth and improvement did you notice in your students? How quickly did you begin to see it?**

*I began to see growth with my students within a month or two after starting the program. The students began to organize their ideas and were able to complete their assignments in a timely manner. Their sentence fluency improved, and they were able to formulate complete sentences. They were able to edit their own work and use descriptive words. They checked for capitalization and punctuation. They liked how the process was set up in steps and how it was easy to follow with the checklist.*

**How is Structure and Style for Students different from other writing curricula you have taught in the past?**

*It is different from curricula I have used in the past due to the format it is taught in. I have not used a writing program that uses videos to teach the writing process. This program focuses on reading a passage and creating a key word outline, which is different from the traditional programs I have used in the past. Also, the writing programs I have used before focused primarily on teaching grammar, punctuation, sentence format, parts of speech, and spelling.*

**What type of support is in place for teachers as they learn and implement the methodology for the first year?**

*The teachers take part in a training program to prepare for the first year. After the training we have access to all the streaming videos and curriculum. We also have a curriculum coordinator working with our school who is available to help if necessary. The teachers also work together to help solve any issues that may arise.*

**Now that a few schools have piloted the program, all ten of the Center Academy schools will be launching into Structure and Style next year. What advice do you have for the new teachers who are joining for the first time? What are the thoughts of your fellow teachers about last year's experience and this year's full-scale implementation?**

*Some advice I have for new teachers joining for the first time is that it is extremely helpful to watch the videos before teaching each of the lessons. The videos explain the process in detail. I also find it helpful to read the stories and create my own KWO (key word outline). My fellow teachers all found the program to be successful with our students. The students' self-confidence increased, and they were excited to continue with the writing program. Many of the students use the KWO to help them create study notes for other subject areas.*

**Looking ahead to the upcoming years, what are your expectations for the program? For your fellow teachers? For your students?**

*My expectation for the upcoming years with this program is to continue to see an improvement in the students' writing ability. I would like to see the students add more descriptive words and details to their writing. The program encourages the use of strong verbs and adjectives, which increases their vocabulary. I would also like the students to use the program across all subject areas. The program will be successful if all the teachers follow the curriculum and if it is cohesive with all grade levels.*




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>
> ~AMY DEL CAMPO~



Jennifer Mauser, B.A. English, is an Accomplished IEW instructor. She began teaching the Structure and Style writing method in 2008. Since then, she has taught writing classes as well as tutored students individually. Also a Master Barton tutor, she specializes in teaching students impacted with learning disabilities, especially students who have dyslexia, dysgraphia, and ADHD. Currently she serves IEW as an Educational Consultant in the Schools Division and as the company's blog writer.