

## Erin Fennell- SIM Apprenticeship Reflection

### **Graduate School 2003-2005 through Classroom Teaching Experiences**

At some point during my M.A.T. specializing in teaching students with Learning Disabilities studies, I received my first SIM professional development. I learned about the Visual Imagery Strategy. I was not yet in my own classroom, so could not put it to immediate use.

Then for the school year 2005-2006, I was in a self-contained, multi-categorical, special education teaching position working with students in grades 9-12. I implemented the SIM Visual Imagery Strategy with one of my reading groups that year. My students were tough to engage, but I found they bought into the strategy, participated in lessons, and enjoyed the sessions.

Over my years teaching, I was able to add SIM's Possible Selves, Multiplication Facts, and Sentence Writing Strategies to my instructional toolbox. When I taught elementary grades, I used both the Fundamentals in Sentence Writing strategy and Multiplication Facts with different resource, model pull-out groups.

I transitioned from the classroom to my current role in our Department of Exceptional Children (DEC,) where I have served as an Instructional Specialist since the 2019-2020 school year.

### **December 2021**

As our district level (DEC) instructional team sought to find options to support writing across our elementary and secondary school needs, I looked to SIM as a possible solution. I reached out, and started working with Jocelyn Washburn to kick off our district's collaboration to bring SIM Sentence Writing Strategies and Summarizing and Paraphrasing Strategy to our special education teachers. We organized our first round of professional development opportunities for the 2022-23 school year.

### **Spring 2023**

My fellow DEC Instructional Specialists and I attended the *Fundamentals of Sentence Writing and Proficiency in Sentence Writing* and *Fundamentals of Paraphrasing and Summarizing* professional development sessions in Spring 2023. These sessions were led by Jocelyn Washburn, Director of Professional Development, and Debbie Higginbotham, Educational Consultant and Professional Learning Leader with the University of Kansas. The Sentence Writing Strategies focused on introducing SIM to our elementary and secondary teachers. And, the Paraphrasing and Summarizing Strategy was targeted for our upper elementary, but mostly secondary level teachers.

### **Fall 2024**

In the Fall of 2024, the South Carolina Cadre Cohort opportunity arose and I enrolled with the hopes of becoming a SIM Learning Strategies Professional Developer. This was the beginning of a 2 year process of learning, teaching, and growing. Debbie Higginbotham has been with our DEC team since the beginning, and has provided mentorship to me throughout this SIM PD Cohort process.

### **Fall 2024 – Spring 2025**

I was able to collaborate with a teacher at Angel Oak Elementary (which became Johns Island Elementary August 2025,) to implement the Fundamentals in Sentence Writing to a group of 3rd graders receiving writing instruction through a pull-out model. I went weekly throughout the school year as we worked through the lessons, ending with Adverbs, in Spring of 2025. To complete the required content, it took until May as school was ending. The group showed mastery level growth of skills in the strategy, and even more exciting growth was seen in their enjoyment of the writing process and the endurance they build to write longer and more sentences.

I tried to implement the *Fundamentals of Paraphrasing and Summarizing* strategy to a group of 5th graders, also at Angel Oak. I saw some benefits to the skills I tried to teach the students, like strengthening vocabulary awareness, using synonyms, and restating information in one's own words. But, I found the specific group faced obstacles that impeded mastery level progress through the stages of the strategy. Attendance and behavior were highly impactful with this

group. Of the 4 students, the highest academically performing student was truant, another student had disruptive and work avoidance behaviors, and a third student had cognitive levels and needs that included modifications to grade level standards on his IEP. I could see where with a different group, and older students, this strategy would have been highly beneficial to the students and effective.

## **Summer 2025**

The South Carolina Cadre hosted the Professional Development Institute with in-person sessions on June 10–12, 2025, as part of the SC Academic Alliance summer academy. I also participated in two virtual sessions in Fall 2025 (three hours each), accompanied by approximately three hours of asynchronous pre-work per session. Our “Strategic 8,” learned and grew together as PD’ers over those summer days and our virtual sessions.

Leaving the summer academy, I felt overwhelmed with the amount of work that remained, but also equipped. Our time over the summer made me dive deep into the extensive SIM resources available through the SIM/UK website, SIMville, learning from team members’ presentations, and developing and delivering my own SIM Overview and LS Overview. Much work lay ahead for the upcoming school year.

## **School Year 2025-2026**

The two virtual SIM sessions, along with the assignments, flew by. I delivered my first SIM professional development with my mentor, Debbie. Following that, I reflected on the experience and annotated copies of the slides used to include feedback I received from participants and my mentor on where to add more/less time and ensure there is more practice time for participants.

Most of my focus this school year was on implementing the Proficiency in Sentence Writing Strategy with a group of 4th graders. Many of the students participated in last year’s Fundamentals in Sentence Writing, but we had a summer lapse, and a few new students in the writing group this year. Again, as

the year progressed, new students joined the writing group as they started working on initial IEP goals.

I administered the Pre-Test, and decided that for the benefit of the whole group, we would start in Proficiency in Sentence Writing with simple sentences. This gave everyone a strong foundation as we worked our way into compound sentences.

I realized that I find the Fundamentals in Sentence Writing easier to use as a teacher. That said, I found the group progressed pretty easily through the simple sentences and we made it to compound sentences. Connecting the concept of compound words, which the students were familiar with already, to the concept of compound sentences made the content approachable for the group.

Some challenges I encountered in working with the group to complete the compound sentences, included new students joining the group, attendance issues in the group, and my schedule. In general, I saved Monday mornings for SIM instruction, and we had several holidays, workdays, and other reasons that we missed group time on Mondays.

My goal was to complete the SIM strategy before SC Ready testing so these 4th graders could go into the writing component fully armed with the SIM writing strategy knowledge and ability to generalize to their TDWs (text dependent writing.) As I planned the last step of showing mastery, with what ended up being their post-test, I prepared lessons based on a mock TDW narrative, writing prompt, and SC Ready writer's checklist. The group spent about three weeks working through reading, using a narrative graphic organizer and the TDW checklist to plan their response, generating ideas (PENS-noting words) to use in their sentences, and then checking their drafts using the SIM sentence requirements.

My last meeting with the SIM writing group occurred after they took the SC Ready Writing component. Students shared experiences with the writing task, including: "I wrote a whole page!" and "The writing was easy." Their teacher reported that students wrote lengthy responses and did not show signs of frustration. To be seen will be their TDW scores this summer!

I am now sharing my experience implementing SIM writing strategies with teams as we are planning for next year. One model I am advocating for, in the pull-out setting, is to schedule SIM instruction a certain number of days/week and allowing for CKLA (gen ed/Tier 1 curriculum) writing on the other days, with SIM aligned checklists and verbiage to have students applying what they are learning in SIM with writing they need to complete for their general education classrooms.

Looking ahead to next year and beyond, in my role as a district level Instructional Specialist, I am setting a fall date for SIM professional development. I hope to collaborate with our new/starting soon, middle school instructional specialist, so that she can attend SIM PD and be able to support the teachers at her schools with SIM. Beyond that, I do hope to have an organized approach to providing students from our elementary to secondary level with SIM strategies that definitely include SIM Sentence Writing and Paraphrasing & Summarizing. I hope to expand our offerings in the future, as we identify needs and gaps in our teachers' tool boxes related to our district special education data.