

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and the Students' Role in Lesson Study

One of the powerful aspects of lesson study is that the observation and analysis targets both how instruction is implemented as well as how instruction is designed. Some lessons are designed primarily around what the teacher will be doing, but for a lesson design to be highly effective attention must also be given to what the student will be doing. The implementation observations need to focus not only on how the lesson is delivered but also on the role of the student during the lesson.

Universal Design for Learning (<http://www.cast.org/our-work/about-udl.html>) provides a framework for designing flexible instruction and lessons that address the learning needs of all students by providing options for engagement, representation, and expression. This design not only leads to increased academic achievement but also to students becoming expert learners, taking ownership of their learning and academic progress. By providing options and choice during the instruction, and helping students analyze the impact of their choices, a lesson study team can design, observe, review, and refine lessons that deeply engage students. Let's look at some ways to increase the active role of all students in a lesson.

Step 1 – Determine the Focus Area

When developing the research theme consider a focus on Universal Design for Learning, Academic Choice, Self-regulated Learning, Personalized Learning, or a similar topic. Each of these topics include components on giving students choice and opportunities for decision making and they can also be used in all content areas. Some resources include:

- Universal Design for Learning
 - <http://www.udlcenter.org/>
 - <http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/expertlearners>
- Academic Choice
 - <http://bit.ly/1UaDiAW>
 - <http://bit.ly/1Yi52GW>
- Self-regulated Learning and Choice
 - <http://bit.ly/1U5bcdD>
- Personalized Learning
 - <http://www.personalizelearning.com/p/home.html>
 - <http://gates.ly/1XtAG1v>

Step 2 – Plan and Design the Lesson

When unpacking the standard(s) and identifying what students need to know, understand, and do in the lesson be sure to include a consideration of the pre-requisite or implied skills. Typical implied or pre-requisite skills can include reading, writing, language, planning and problem solving, critical thinking, organization and synthesis of information, task persistence, self-regulation, active listening, collaboration, responsibility, leadership, perspective-taking, and more.

Problems in these areas can become barriers to students achieving the intent of the standard. Use the UDL framework and guidelines (<http://bit.ly/1jBlt5>) to provide options and technology tools that students can use to scaffold implied skills they struggle with.

Use student centric language when developing learning goals and rubrics. Instead of starting a goal with “The student will . . .,” try using language like “I can . . .” to start the goal and each item in a rubric scale. Changing language to student centric language can help the student take ownership of the goal and can help the student understand where their performance is on a rubric.

Also, include flexible language in the learning goals, giving students options on how they demonstrate what they have learned. If a goal says something like “I will write about the stages of butterfly metamorphosis” then the student is locked into writing to demonstrate understanding. But if the goal says something like “I will demonstrate my understanding of the stages of butterfly metamorphosis” then the student can choose how to demonstrate understanding.

When determining the data collection process and data analysis tools, be sure to include student access to appropriate parts of the data in the steps of your process. Students need feedback so they can engage in instructional problem solving.

Step 3 – Implement and Observe

The types of instructional materials you use will have a big impact on how well you are able to implement a universally designed lesson. Will you be able to provide leveled text? What options will students have with digital instructional materials? Are there technology tools and scaffolds to support the implied skills? All of these are things to consider prior to lesson implementation.

Team members should have some set questions to help guide the observations, especially when looking at the role of the student. Are the students making choices? Are the students reflecting on what they really understand? Are the students demonstrating any problem solving skills? Collecting data on these types of questions will enrich the analysis of the lesson.

Step 4 – Review and Refine

At this stage the team members should have data on how the lesson was implemented, the academic outcomes, and the engagement of the students in making choices and taking ownership of their learning. Can the lesson be refined to increase student engagement, academic choice, and student ownership? Are additional options needed to reduce barriers to students addressing the core intent of the standards? Are more supports needed to help students analyze their own understanding? This is a time to re-examine the UDL guidelines for ideas on how to increase the flexibility and responsiveness of the lesson to your particular students, and for ideas on how to increase the active role of the student.

Conclusion

The lesson study is a great process for improving instruction, and the UDL framework can be used in a lesson study to aid in improving instruction as well as transforming the learning environment. In addition, the reflection and analysis of UDL options, student engagement, academic choice, and student ownership can give the lesson study team a deep understanding of how to implement Universal Design for Learning in any content area.