

A Case Study Examining One School's Trek Towards More Inclusive Practice

K. Alisa Lowrey

University of Southern Mississippi, USA

Kathy Howery

University of Alberta, Canada

Leonard Troughton

University of Southern Mississippi, USA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss an in-depth case study involving one school's mission to increase inclusive practices through the utilization of Universal Design for Learning paired with evidence-based practices. Specifically, a K-9 private school in Canada approached a research team about utilizing a measurement tool to measure the inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorders in inclusive classrooms. After much discussion, the researchers and team agreed upon a year-long course of action to improve services for all students within the school, including those with ASD. A course of intervention was outlined that included pieces such as a needs assessment, training coaches, multiple observation assessments, intermittent coaching, and scheduled professional development. The purpose of this chapter will be to discuss the overall plan designed as well as lessons learned along the way.

PREFACE

In teacher education and research, researchers often discuss successful endeavors—those things that went right. Researchers and teachers discuss contributions that teach or inform us about evidence-based practices, proof of concept, or reliable and valid methods. Limitations, including errors, are often reduced or minimized to a paragraph of ‘oops, we should’ve’ or ‘wish we would’ve’. There are lessons to be learned, however, in those missteps, in the things that were not foreseen. Evaluation of teacher practices is how the field improves (Mårtensson, et al., 2016). Self-reflection and self-evaluation are necessary components of any successful practitioner’s growth process (Sullivan, et al., 2016), whatever the practice may be. Dissemination or sharing what one has learned is a key concept of academia (Head, 2020). It is with this in mind that this team decided to tell the story of its work with one school towards increasing their inclusive practices using the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) guidelines (CAST, 2018), evidence-based interventions, and communication strategies. In this chapter, the authors share their development and implementation plan, successes, failures, and reflections on their entire journey. It is hope that by doing so, the authors offer the readers the ability to take these lessons and develop a stronger model in their own work. It is also hoped that by recounting this trek, the authors encourage other practitioners to reflect on the broader challenges of bringing research to practice.

UDL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Implementing the UDL framework in K-12 schools has steadily grown with its inclusion in national policies like the United States’ Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 and the Higher Education Act of 2008. How implementation occurs is important to document; Professional development (PD) matters. Teachers can have a significant impact on students’ learning (Waitoller & Artiles, 2013). Teacher impact is more significant than the effect of school on student learning (Nye et al., 2004). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2005) has identified teacher quality as the most important variable affecting student achievement. A critical element for any school system is the “capacity to nurture and develop teachers who have the understandings, skills, critical sensibilities, and contextual awareness to provide quality educational access, participation, and outcomes for all students” (Waitoller & Artiles, 2013, p. 320). PD packages should be directly tied to effective design of curriculum and instruction that itself leads to improved student outcomes for all students, including those with disabilities. The UDL framework is directly tied to effective curriculum design and instruction, appropriate for all

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