

Deepening UDL Practice Through A "UDL Video Club"

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Abstract

This session shares findings from a study that explored the potential of a "UDL Video Club" to help teachers deepen their UDL practice. The UDL Video Club included two researchers and two fifth-grade teachers who met regularly to analyze footage from the teachers classrooms. Throughout their eight months of collaboration, the teachers developed an understanding of UDL as they analyzed instructional methods and student thinking through a UDL lens. In this session, the researchers and teachers involved in this study share findings that reveal how the UDL Video Club helped the teachers more readily anticipate barriers to learning, and leverage UDL to reduce those barriers, to refocus on the critical importance of attending to their students thinking, and to share ideas and develop cross-disciplinary collaboration. The researchers and teachers will then facilitate an exploration of the features of the club that proved especially useful in supporting teacher learning. Finally, session participants will engage in a UDL Video Club simulation and reflect on the potential of this approach in their own schools and districts.

Keywords

UDL application, teacher learning, teacher collaboration, classroom practice, video footage.

INTRODUCTION

Exploring video footage of a teacher's own practice can play a valuable role in supporting teacher learning (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Lampert & Ball, 1998; McCullagh, 2012; Roth, 2007; Sherin & Han, 2004). Teachers often do not have the time to reflect on their practice, and capturing lessons via video provides teachers with opportunities to analyze their instructional methods and the nature of student thinking. Given the potential of video to support teacher learning, Jenna Gravel and Allison Posey (two researchers from CAST) along with Emily Ortiz and Christina Rosenthal (two fifth-grade teachers) collaborated to begin a "UDL Video Club." They wanted to explore how a video club might support teachers to deepen their practice regarding UDL. Specifically, they explored the following research questions: 1) In what ways can a video club support teachers in applying UDL to engage diverse learners in meaningful learning experiences? 2) In what ways can a video club support teachers analysis of student thinking (i.e. students' ideas expressed through their questions, comments, work products, etc.)? 3) What aspects of the UDL Video Club

did teachers self-report as being particularly useful in developing their practice and/or perceptions? Which did they feel were less useful, and why? In this session, the teams present their findings regarding these research questions. They will then provide session participants with the opportunity to engage in a UDL Video Club simulation so they can experience this learning opportunity for themselves and reflect on the potential of this approach in their own schools and districts.

METHODS

Participants

Emily and Christina decided to participate in this project because they had recently completed CAST's "Introduction to UDL" online course and were eager to deepen their understanding of the UDL framework. In addition, they had experience with analyzing video of their own teaching through the teacher education program that they both attended, and they recognized the potential of video to support their development as educators. Emily and Christina are both 5th grade teachers at an elementary school located in an urban district in the northeast. Their students bring a diversity of strengths, weaknesses, languages, and cultures to their school community. Of the approximately 900 students enrolled in the school at the time of the UDL Video Club, 34 percent identified as White, 22 percent as African American, 23 percent as Asian, 17 percent as Hispanic, and 5 percent as multi-race.¹ Approximately 40 percent of students were classified as "economically disadvantaged,"² 46 percent of students spoke English as a second language, and 10 percent of students were English language learners. Furthermore, 20 percent of students received special education services. Emily and Christina each selected the same class to focus on for the UDL Video Club. This class was made up of 22 students and was reflective of the diversity at the school level. Emily was their teacher for English Language Arts and Social Studies, and Christina was their teacher for Science.

Data Collection

The UDL Video Club met five times from November 2017 to June 2018, with sessions approximately 80 minutes long.

¹ These data to describe the school were retrieved from the State's Department of Education website and have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

² This is a term used by the State's Department of Education.

During each club meeting, the “presenting teacher” shared a video clip that contained a question to explore (a moment of challenge, surprise, confusion, etc.). The presenting teacher also shared instructional materials and/or student work to complement the video. Then the team watched the video clip together, paying particular attention to the goal, the substance of students’ ideas as evidenced through students’ questions, comments, work products, etc., and the teacher’s instructional methods. Finally, they reflected on the video using a “Video Club Protocol” (see Appendix A). The protocol prompted discussion of the goal, student thinking in relation to the goal, barriers to the goal, and the ways UDL was applied to support students in reaching the goal, or could have been applied. Each meeting concluded with a reflection on how the session supported the teachers’ learning and how future sessions might be refined to more fully support the teachers’ growth.

Data were collected across the project through a range of methods: 1) video and audio recording of each UDL Video Club session, 2) field notes from each session, 3) collection of all video clips and related materials and/or student work, and 4) a final interview to reflect on the UDL Video Club experience. This range of data allowed Jenna and Allison to conduct a thorough examination of the research questions. In order to analyze the first research question, “*In what ways can a video club support teachers in applying UDL to engage diverse learners in meaningful learning experiences?*” they used a set of codes based on the UDL Guidelines as well as an open-coding strategy to code video, fieldnotes, and materials and/or student work, as well as the final interviews. In order to analyze the second research question, “*In what ways can a video club support teachers in the analysis of student thinking?*” Jenna and Allison used an open coding strategy to code the video and fieldnotes, paying particular attention to the ways that teachers were attending to the substance of students’ ideas. They also used an open coding strategy to code the final interviews, paying attention to teachers self-perceptions of how their analysis of student thinking may or may not have changed. Finally, in order to analyze the third research question, “*What aspects of the video club did teachers self-report as being particularly useful in developing their practice and/or perceptions? Which did they feel were less useful? Why?*” Jenna and Allison used an open coding strategy to code the reflective conversations as well as reflections in the final interviews. Finally, a “member checking” approach was used to ensure that the findings were accurate and trustworthy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Jenna and Allison shared the findings with Emily and Christina to gain their reactions and perspectives.

FINDINGS

In this session, the team presented findings revealing how the UDL Video Club supported teacher growth. Engaging in the UDL Video Club allowed Emily and Christina to more readily anticipate barriers to learning and to leverage

specific UDL guidelines to reduce those barriers. For example, Emily shared a video clip of a lesson in which students were writing formal letters to experts in their community to seek support with research projects that they were working on in Christina’s science class. Emily anticipated that conducting online searches for local experts would be a barrier to many students, and she designed a “Formal Letter Graphic Organizer” that offered guidance and accompanying screen shots to support each stage of the online process. Analyzing the video and seeing evidence of her students’ success with the graphic organizer inspired Emily to recognize the importance of applying UDL in ways that increased access for her students. She stated, “I think that my lesson plans prior to . . . the Video Club, were . . . more difficult to understand.” She felt that UDL helped her “rethink the process of learning” and increase access to her learning goals. She came to believe that “the Guidelines [are] a reminder . . . to go back to the basics, . . . the nuts and bolts of breaking down your lesson plan or activity” to address barriers.

Second, the UDL Video Club inspired Emily and Christina to refocus on the critical importance of attending to their students’ thinking. Emily stated, “I came out of grad school really wanting to listen to kids, . . . the most interesting part . . . of the job for me, . . . I think it’s really easy to lose . . . [your focus on student thinking] once you’re [busy with the demands] . . . of the public schools.” She reflected, “This year I felt like it was Video Club that helped me go back to that [focus on student thinking] because I have had to look for evidence of learning in my videos.” Emily continued to reflect on how the UDL Video Club allowed her to come back to the practice “of using the language of student thinking . . . to remain in an evidence-based mindset.” Christina also reflected on how the Video Club helped her to continue to refine her practice of attending to students’ ideas. She stated, “[There is] just so much going on when you are teaching—even in a small group. Being able to talk to them [the students] and pay attention to the rest of the class and pay attention to what they are doing and what they are saying—I definitely realize that I miss a lot of stuff.”

Third, the UDL Video Club helped Emily and Christina to share ideas and develop cross-disciplinary collaboration. For example, Christina began a project in which her students researched authentic problems within their communities and designed solutions in a Makerspace. Emily designed a lesson to teach students to write formal letters to experts within the community asking for advice with their projects. Reflecting on the success of this lesson prompted Emily and Christina to consider other ways that they might continue to collaborate. Students would be presenting their projects at an “Exhibition Night” for families and community members, and Emily suggested that she teach students how to develop their presentations as part of her ELA class,

an authentic way to support students in “writing for public speaking.” This seed of an idea culminated in an “Exhibition Night” in which students shared projects that were reflective of their learning across both science and ELA.

Finally, the team explored the features of the UDL Video Club that proved useful, or were barriers to supporting teacher learning. For example, Emily reflected on the value of the protocol “to help focus on the barriers/approaches rather than simply the frustrations.” Christina reflected on the usefulness of having Jenna and Allison generate a transcript to accompany the video, noting how these multiple means were “UDL for teachers—different ways to understand what was going on.” The teachers also noted challenges. For example, both teachers reflected on feelings of vulnerability that come with sharing video of your own classroom and how critical it is to develop trust among participants.

IMPLICATIONS AND VIDEO CLUB SIMULATION

These findings point to important implications for stakeholders who seek to design more innovative professional learning experiences—experiences that empower educators to deepen their UDL practice through collaborative reflection and analysis. The team will engage session participants in a UDL Video Club simulation so that they can experience this approach for themselves. Session participants will analyze a video clip from an inclusive fifth-grade English Language Arts classroom and use an abbreviated version of the club protocol to explore themes related to the goal, the students thinking, and the application of UDL. Session participants will then have the opportunity to share their experiences and reflect on the potential of this approach in the contexts of their own schools and districts.

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APPENDIX A

Pilot Video Club Protocol

Pre-work for presenting teacher

- Video tape a lesson where you are trying out an aspect of UDL
- Choose a segment (about 5-7 mins) that presents a question for you that you would like to explore with the group (a moment of challenge, surprise, confusion, etc.)
- Collect any student work or instructional materials that might complement the video
- Send clip to CAST facilitators to transcribe

“Club” meeting (45 mins)

- Presenting teacher sets the context of the video segment (5)
 - What is the lesson goal?
 - What came before/after this segment?
 - Highlights the particulars of the moment that are most interesting/confusing
- Group watches the segment (10)
- Discussion (25)
 - What is the learning goal?
 - What kinds of student thinking are happening (verbal, action, artifact, etc.)?
 - Are there any aspects of UDL that seem to be supporting the kinds of student thinking you want to generate?
 - Are there any barriers to the kinds of student thinking you want to generate?
 - How might we apply UDL to reduce those barriers?
- Reflection (5)
 - Was this useful? Not useful?
 - What can we refine for our next meeting?

Materials for each “Club” meeting

- Video
- Transcript
- Student work and/or instructional materials, as needed
- Computer/monitor to view video