

Customizing Learning for All Students: Teaching in a Blended Learning Environment

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Abstract

In this paper, learn about one district's journey toward customizing the learning experience for all students. By implementing a systemic and strategic approach, teachers and administrators create instructional goals, methods, materials, and assessments that work for everyone. Through the use of a District Wide Learning Management System that applies the principles of UDL, teachers can provide students with experiences that allow for flexible approaches to learning that can be customized and adjusted for individual needs of their students.

Keywords

Universal Design for Learning, Learning Management System

INTRODUCTION

Fraser Public Schools is located in Fraser, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit. The district has one Early Childhood Center, six elementary buildings, one middle school, and one high school. Of the current enrollment of 5,261 students, 34% of the student population reside out of district and attend through Schools of Choice. We are in our fourth year of a 1:1 iPad learning environment. In addition, all buildings are equipped with robust Wi-Fi access and Apple TV.

BACKGROUND

Over the past five years, Fraser has experienced a true digital conversion that has impacted both the learning environment and teacher practice. In 2011, voters passed a \$19.9 million bond proposal that provided the funds to begin this digital Transformation. Prior to making any purchases, the Curriculum Committee met to determine the district's instructional needs. This group of key stakeholders began the conversation around the Universal Design for Learning Framework.

The Instructional Technology Committee was charged with developing the Fraser Public Schools roadmap to planning the delivery of instruction across all grade levels This included:

- Defining Learning Environments across the grades
- Developing the components of the Learning Environment at each level

- Developing the timeline for the implementation of the Learning Environment including professional development
- Determining the list of resources that are needed

This group of key stakeholders met for most of the year to discuss and study the needs of the district and plan for the implementation and spending of bond dollars.

Fraser's Implementation Process

In the fall of 2012, as the district began iPad deployment, administrators and teachers began training in the Universal Design for Learning Framework. Partnering with the Macomb Intermediate School District (MISD), we used the professional development resources and tools from MISD's E3T Project (Engage, Expand, and Encompass).

The E3T project is dedicated to providing teachers with the tools and strategies they need to remove curriculum barriers and increase learning opportunities for every learner. With E3T support, the district created a flexible curriculum that would meet the needs of all of students.

E3T is based upon the [Universal Design for Learning](#) or UDL framework. It provided the district with an instructional design model and professional development that supported teachers and administrators during the early stages of 1:1 implementation.

In order to have a consistent framework around instruction practice, we used the E3T UDL Lesson Plan Creator to provide a systematic approach to teaching and learning (see Figure 1). In addition, all teachers received training in the following learning modules (<http://e3t.org/on-line-modules.html>):

- Students in the Margins
- Introduction to Universal Design
- Framing the Learning
- Developing a Web Presence
- Lesson Openers
- Big Ideas and Essential Questions
- Summative Assessments

This was critical training that led to the need to begin implementation of a district wide learning management system that would allow teachers, students, and administrators

to have a consistent model of instruction design within the LMS.

Figure 1: UDL Lesson Plan Creator



UDL Lesson Plan Creator

The E3T Lesson Plan Creator for universally designed curriculum focuses on the following main elements.

- BIG IDEAS:** *The concepts or principles central to the lesson that anchor or connect the smaller ideas.*
- ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:** *Questions that help students probe for deeper meaning.*
- LEARNING OBJECTIVES:** *2-4 learning targets that reflect the understandings or insights students are expected to develop by the end of this lesson.*
- SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT:** *Provide a choice of topics (when appropriate) and multiple options of means for completing the assessment to support different learning needs/preferences. Include an explicit description of the criteria for quality work.*
- LESSON OPENING:** *Lesson openers establish a purpose, are engaging and activate prior knowledge.*
- EXPLORATION:** *Activities that help students make discoveries related to big idea(s) and promote student inquiry.*
- CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING:** *Determine the student's level of understanding as it relates to the big idea, essential questions and learning objectives. Use methods that assess all learners and addresses the next steps based on the assessment results.*
- EXPLANATION:** *Information delivered so that students develop a mastery of the objectives. Includes explicit learning strategies, multiple representations of info provided, frequent opportunities for response and practice and a variety of student centered learning activities.*
- CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING:** *Determine the student's level of understanding as it relates to the big idea, essential questions and learning objectives. Includes a plan for re-teaching material as needed.*
- EXTENDED PRACTICE:** *Activities used to help deepen understanding and provide for greater fluency and accuracy of new skills.*
- CLOSING:** *A review of big ideas for the purpose of tying ideas together, transitioning to next lesson or continuing practice.*

Adapted from: *Planning Effective Instruction* (Price, Nelson) 2008

NEXT STEPS IN THE JOURNEY

As Fraser continues down the path of personalizing learning for students, we have partnered with Modern Teacher (<https://modernteacher.com/>). They have provided staff and administration with additional tools to help support the district's vision of moving to a Competency Based Learning model and truly customizing learning for all.

Throughout our transformation process, we continue to put students first. As a district we believe in creating a system that allows students to progress through their learning on an individual path, pace, and place. In order to provide that path for our students, solid design truly supports the focus of the work.

TITLE AND AUTHORS

Carrie Wozniak is the Assistant Superintendent of Fraser Public Schools. Her work in Fraser focuses on K-12 Curriculum and Instruction. Fraser Public Schools has deployed over 5,000 iPads district wide. She has worked closely with her technology department to ensure that students, teachers, and staff have the training and background to implement a dramatic change to the learning environment. Before taking the position of Assistant Superintendent in Fraser Public Schools, Carrie was a Literacy and English Language Arts Consultant for the Macomb Intermediate School District, (2006-2011).

REFERENCES

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