

CommunicationPoints

Warming Up for the Road Ahead: A Quick Look at the Lesson Planning Process

Lesson planning is a lot like stretching before a workout: it's something we know we should do but often want to breeze through because it takes extra time. Admittedly, time is not something most of us have a lot of, especially with the multiple hats we as educators are pressed to wear. Still, like stretching, lesson planning is time well spent. It prevents or at least prepares us for what's down the road. What's more, the more lesson planning is practiced, the easier and more efficient it becomes.

As our work with the NCSC GSEG unfolds, we'll be looking at some sample lesson plans that will likely be different from the ones to which many of us have been accustomed. In fact, one of the webinars we are in the process of developing focuses on the math unit that was developed through the National Alternate Assessment Center (NAAC). Remember that you can access NAAC's units (there's one for high school math, middle school science, and elementary language arts) at naacpartners.org.

As you were likely reminded during your state's CoP orientation meeting, special educators were initially prepared to approach lesson planning as a means to teach discrete skills/tasks. We know that there has since been a shift to developing lessons for and teaching skills that build to an understanding of "concepts." So, the lesson plans we'll be looking at, the lessons you will be asked to try out and provide feedback on, and the lessons that you will ultimately want to develop and use on your own will have some features that are perhaps different than

the way you may have been approaching your lesson plans. Because, even though you've been teaching academic content for years now, you were not likely given much professional development on how to plan lessons and units, which is a big reason for our grant work.

One thing that you can be doing now to prepare for what's down the road is to get your hands on some general education lessons. In addition to the NAAC units, you could gather lessons from general education teachers you know, and certainly there is a plethora of online sample lesson plans. While not all lesson plans are created equally, looking at the kinds of language, materials and student engagement activities the lessons contain can help you start to think about how students with significant cognitive disabilities could access the content of those same lessons when provided appropriate supports and accommodations. It might also alleviate some of your stress, knowing that you do not necessarily have to create every lesson from scratch yourself. Of course, communication is the key, and as you know, we'll be addressing the issue of communication over and over throughout our work.

Still, as you read through general education lessons, pay attention to the verbs. Highlight them. What is the student being asked to do? Then think about how your students might demonstrate those verbs when provided a means to receive information and express what they have learned. To help with that, remember the Menu of Supports that was in your list of resources provided at your CoP orientation. The Menu of Supports is an invaluable tool that examines the kinds of things that general

education lessons often include then provides suggestions as to how a student with intellectual disability might be able to access the content of those lessons.

The best lessons are the ones that begin with a teaser to spark student interest, activate prior knowledge, and establish expectations and goals for the lesson. Then the lesson moves into an activity, demonstration and/or direct instruction strategy that is the “meat” of the lesson followed by opportunities for the student to practice what is being taught both with guidance and then independently. Finally, the lesson ends with some sort of closure as well as a formative assessment, which not only gives you and the student evidence

of what the student has learned but also provides you with information that should help guide your plans for future lessons. Once you get into that mindset and start writing lessons that follow that kind of format (which is basically the format the NAAC lessons use), the lesson planning process should come more naturally and quickly to you.

We have many miles to go in our CoP work, and luckily, we have time to learn, practice, refine and learn some more. That’s what Work Group III is really all about. So, start thinking about the lesson planning process and take a look at what’s already out there. That should really help you as you take steps to further improve your approach to instruction.

WebEx Update: What to Expect as We Learn Together

The first webinar has been completed! It’s posted and available on our WebEX website. Your University of Kentucky NCSC state lead will send you a link so you can view it when it is most convenient for you. Each webinar will have an accompanying study guide that you will complete and return to your NCSC state lead. After you view the webinar and complete the study guide, you will

participate in a live “chat” hosted by your state lead. The chat will provide an opportunity to discuss the webinar content, but more importantly, provide an opportunity to get to know and interact with your state’s fellow CoP members. If you have questions about the webinar format or issues with technology/inability to access the webinar, please contact your University of Kentucky NCSC state lead.

Universal Design for Learning: Principles to Consider

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a familiar term to many educators and indicates the use of a set of principles for curriculum design that afford the best opportunity for successful learning for a population of students with diverse learning styles. Ideally, UDL is familiar not only as a theory, but as a practice. Implementing UDL principles in the classroom benefits all students and builds flexibility into instruction and assessment. It is described on the CAST website as “a blueprint for creating instructional goals, methods, materials, and assessments that work for everyone – not a single, one-size fits all solution.”

Of course, this flexibility is particularly

important in alternate assessment as we seek to provide instruction and accommodations in the classroom. Unique abilities of each student can be supported by designing instruction that considers how students learn, what they already know that can be built upon, and the ways in which students can be motivated to learn. If we have high expectations for student performance, we are encumbered with the responsibility of delivering optimally effective instruction.

Why is it important to understand the principles of UDL? Consider these questions when planning instruction: How will the student perceive the information? How can the salient points be clarified

and emphasized? How will the student demonstrate understanding? What will keep the student enthusiastic and engaged in the learning process?

Implementing UDL principles compels the instructor to plan for multiple means of

representation, of expression, and of engagement. All students benefit from carefully planned instruction, creative and varied presentation, and assessment that affords every opportunity for demonstration of knowledge and understanding.

Communication Corner: This month's communication tip is to remember to make communication easy.

Remember to “make communication easy” for the student. If the student is using an Augmented/Assistive Communication (AAC) device to request your attention, make it easy for the student to use by 1.) placing the device so that the student can activate it easily and 2.) reducing the pressure required for activating the device. Resist the temptation to build in motor skill practice when a student is learning to use an AAC device. We are sometimes tempted to require the student to cross the midline to access the device or require the student to reach when activating the AAC device, in the hope of reinforcing motor skills as well as communication. This practice is a one of the “deadly communication sins” which will actually prevent students from building communication skills because of the energy and concentration required by the body to reach is exhausting! While practicing motor skills is important, look for other opportunities to practice separate from communication activities.

A word of warning: when a student finds a voice, they are likely to use it both appropriately and sometimes even inappropriately. Always respond to the message on the AAC device. For example, if the device says “Help, please”... respond by saying

- “Thank you insert name for using your name device, How can I help you?” or

- “Thank you insert name for using your name device to let me know you need help. Please wait, and I’ll help you in a minute.”

If you think the student is just “playing” with the device, respond by saying

- “Thank you insert name for using your name device. I hear you, but I cannot come right now, please wait.” Or, “Thank you insert name for talking, but in group time only one person talks at a time. It is insert name turn to talk.”

That way the student learns that the device has a specific purpose. If it appears to be a mistake or accident, make the following comment:

- “Oops! Did you make a mistake?” or Give the student a way to make a comment appropriately by changing or adding a message that says “Awesome” or “Cool”.

Students will then learn to control the activation of the device at the appropriate time. If the student continues to accidentally activate the device and seems frustrated by the accident, try a device that requires more pressure to activate but **maintain easy access**. Remember, it is better to invest the time in teaching the student to use the device at the appropriate time, than to turn off the device and take away his/her voice!

Do you have a communication tip that you would like to share with CoP members in your state or across the country? If so, please send it to mindy.rodan@uky.edu and we may include it our next newsletter!