NCSE PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH PILOT PROGRAMME

SCHOOL RESEARCH SUMMARY

School name: Coláiste/Gaelcholáiste Choilm, Ballincollig, Cork.

Practising teacher lead: Conor Owens and David Bowen

Research theme: Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Research aim: To explore the impact of UDL principles on student motivation, ownership, and learning outcomes, with a specific focus on the benefits for students with Additional Educational Needs (AEN).

Methods

We implemented UDL principles in the classroom by focusing on the principle of "multiple means of action and expression." This involved offering students different ways of engaging with the content and expressing their understanding of the opening section of The Outsiders by S.E. Hinton. Students were provided with choices in how they interacted with the material and how they chose to demonstrate their learning. We used surveys to gauge students' preferences for presentation formats and allowed them autonomy in their learning processes. Additionally, teachers piloted this approach in their respective classrooms, experimenting with various methods of assessment, including both traditional and UDL-informed assessments.

The project involved 8 teachers from different subject areas, working with a range of mixed-ability students across several classrooms. The total number of student participants varied depending on the individual teacher's class, but a significant number of students across different year groups were involved in the pilot project.

The research involved students, teachers, and some subject department heads. Students participated in the study by providing feedback through surveys on their learning experiences, while teachers actively engaged with the UDL framework in their classrooms. Teachers from 8 different subjects collaborated.

Research findings

The research indicated that the implementation of UDL principles in the classroom significantly enhanced student motivation, engagement, and ownership of their learning. In particular, there was a noticeable improvement in the learning outcomes for students with Additional Educational Needs (AEN), particularly those with dysgraphia.

Both students and teachers reported positive experiences with the UDL framework, with increased enthusiasm and higher quality work being observed across the board.

My top three findings

1. **Increased Engagement:** Both students and teachers reported higher levels of engagement in lessons where UDL principles were applied. The flexibility in how students could engage with the content and demonstrate their understanding seemed to encourage greater involvement in the learning process.

2. **Enhanced Learning for Students with AEN:** There was a marked improvement in the learning outcomes for students with Additional Educational Needs (AEN), particularly those with dysgraphia, who found the alternative assessment methods more accessible and empowering.

3. **Positive Teacher Feedback:** Teachers expressed increased confidence in using UDL principles and found that it reduced reliance on traditional didactic teaching methods, creating a more dynamic and flexible learning environment.

Impact of my research

As a result of the positive outcomes from the initial pilot, the school has expanded the UDL practitioners from 2 to 8 teachers across different subject areas. The research findings have also sparked a wider interest in incorporating UDL principles throughout the school. Teachers are now incorporating more diverse means of assessment in their classrooms, and there is a growing desire to extend UDL strategies across other subjects in the curriculum.

The research findings have led to the adoption of more flexible and inclusive teaching practices across the school. Many teachers now provide multiple methods of engagement and assessment, ensuring that our students, regardless of their learning needs, can access and express their understanding of the content in ways that work best for them. Additionally, there has been increased collaboration among teachers, sharing best practices and discussing how to implement UDL strategies across their subjects.

Other impact from this research includes:

•Increased Student Motivation and Ownership: The findings highlight a significant boost in student motivation, particularly when students were given choices in how they engaged with the content and demonstrated their learning.
•Enhanced Inclusivity for AEN Students: The research showed that UDL can effectively support students with AEN, offering them alternative ways to participate and succeed in their learning.
•Teacher Empowerment and Development: Teachers reported feeling more confident in their teaching practices and were enthusiastic about integrating UDL into their lessons. This has fostered a sense of professional development and collaboration within the school.
•Wider School-Wide Impact: The successful implementation of UDL principles in one class has paved the way for expanding the practice to other subjects, creating a more inclusive learning environment across our school.

In summary, this project has not only enhanced student learning and motivation but has also contributed to a broader cultural shift towards more inclusive and flexible teaching practices within the school.