NCSE PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH PROGRAMME 2025/26

SCHOOL RESEARCH SUMMARY

School name: Le Chéile Secondary School, Ballincollig, Cork.

Practising teacher lead: Stephanie Coffey

Research theme: INclusive Classrooms for Learning and Achievement in School Settings: Accomplished Inclusive Learning Environments for students with AEN

Research aim:

- To address the gap between teachers' attitudes to inclusive teaching for students with AEN and their knowledge and skills in the same area.
- To generate narratives of successful and accomplished inclusive pedagogical practice in classrooms by teachers in order to exemplify 'what good looks like' in inclusive practice.
- To develop teachers as research partners in the INCLASS research intervention
- To disseminate findings from the study amongst participants, advocacy groups and policy makers in order to guide future practice and engagement regarding inclusive practice/ pedagogy in school settings.

Methods

Observation guided by a template guiding thoughts on observing inclusive practice (adapted from Morrison, 1993 in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013)

There was 4 schools and 12 teachers engaged in this research. Participants included students, teachers and parents.

Research findings

The UDL framework is at the heart of creating inclusive learning environments for all students. ‘What is essential for some is beneficial for all’.

My top three findings

- The importance of the role of the special needs assistant in facilitating and promoting inclusion of AEN pupils within the mainstream classroom.
- Collaborative approaches are a form of inclusion - team teaching, opportunities and challenges.
- Universal design for learning as a pedagogical strategy for facilitating inclusion for all pupils. ‘What is essential for some is beneficial for all.’ (adding structure to lessons, predictability, sharing of learning intentions, VAKT strategies, opportunities to redraft work, formative feedback, etc.)

Impact of my research

We shared our findings in a whole school presentation during a staff meeting and demonstrated some practical approaches for using UDL in the classroom.

Staff acknowledged the benefits of multiple means of representation, engagement and expression in providing choice for students in the classroom.

I have personally found that using visuals when presenting new information is very inclusive for all learners. I have found that providing students with choice when it comes to homework tasks in particular is very motivational for them and I have found that students are more reflective of their learning when they can express themselves through different mediums eg. digitally, artistically etc.

Conducting this research has yielded a number of significant benefits within our own school community.

Firstly, it allowed us to deepen our understanding of inclusive teaching and provisions for pupils with additional needs within the mainstream classroom, particularly in the area of a universal design for learning. Teachers within our setting seem to have a more positive understanding of inclusive practice/pedagogies, with teachers now understanding that UDL is an effective planning tool from the outset to help meet all learners needs and remove obstacles to learning, rather than as 'additional work' or as an individualised reactive approach. UDL is a proactive approach that benefits all whereas differentiation is reactive and deficit-based approach.

Secondly, this project gave us the opportunity to clarify confusion and misconceptions around inclusive teaching and the differences between differentiation and UDL. Our presentation to the whole staff allowed us to start from scratch and offer meaningful guidance for our colleagues. This was a very affirming experience for our teaching staff. Teachers were pleasantly surprised to find our research had come from evidence of good practice in our school and that they were already implementing UDL without knowing what it was.

Thirdly, our research helped to bridge the gap between the AEN department and mainstream teachers. It is now understood that inclusion is the responsibility of every teacher and not just the role of the ANA or AEN department. It has also encouraged teachers to reach out for support and guidance, and strong lines of communication have been opened as a result.

Finally, our school is more open to sharing good practice and allowing others into their classrooms for observations. This was a very affirming experience for all teachers involved as it highlighted good practice and what we are doing well to support our students.