Instructor's Guide for Universal Design for Learning

Topic Area: Instruction

Module: Universal Design for Learning

Case Study: To Group Or Not To Group

Summary: Karen, a third grade teacher at Madison School, has increased responsibility this year. Last year her district decided to cut back a number on positions, including that of their reading specialist. In years past, Karen had depended heavily on Carla, Madison School's reading specialist, especially since the students who attend Madison School come from diverse backgrounds and have many different types of academic needs. Without Carla to help her support her low achieving students, Karen faces new challenges as she tries to accommodate the needs of all her students. Grouping students by ability has become routine and a bit boring for the entire class, so Karen decides to try using cooperative grouping and graphic organizers to meet the learning needs of all her students and infuse some variety into reading time along the way.

Characters and Roles:
- Karen, third grade teacher
- Pat, Karen's mentor teacher
- Carlos, Anna, Charles, students

Tools:
- Graphic Organizer
- Cooperative Learning
- Tiered Assignments

Artifacts:
- Blank T-Chart
- Time For Kids
- Sample of Karen's Lesson
- Blank Guided Reading Lesson Plan
- Sample T-Chart Completed by a Student

Glossary Terms:
- Cooperative Groups
- Rally Table Fashion
- Tiered Assignments

Web Sites:
- www.brainchild.com
Discussion Points:
- What are the pros and cons of ability grouping students?
- What instructional models are most effective when teaching reading?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of using cooperative groups?
- What are the advantages of organizing skill groups?
- What are the advantages of "flexible grouping"?
- Brainstorm interventions that could assist students reading below grade level.

Activities:
- Prepare a lesson using cooperative groups.
- Research the topic of grouping students by ability for reading instruction.
- Invite a librarian to do booktalks on recently published books.
- Introduce Readers' Theatre as a strategy to engage students in books.

Reflective Question: Scene 1, Question 3 - Budget cuts required Karen's school to eliminate the reading specialist position. Brainstorm ways classroom teachers in Karen's building could meet the needs of those students reading below grade level in their classrooms. Recent research has given teachers a great deal of information to improve the instruction of reading. Unfortunately, if veteran teachers have not taken college classes or workshops on reading in the last five years or so, they might not have the knowledge that would help them meet the needs of all students. Therefore, the first thing a principal should do is require quality staff development on reading instruction for all teachers. Once teachers know how to effectively teach reading, they need to devote a significant amount of time to doing so. The reading time should include direct instruction, listening centers, word study centers, read alouds, silent reading, author and illustrator studies, guest readers, booktalks, storytelling, and time at the library. Volunteers should be invited to assist with centers, listen to students read, read to students, play games, and generally support the reading instruction. Volunteers could be parents, grandparents, community members, older students, or retired teachers. Some all school activities might motivate students and parents. Plan a Family Reading Night when parents and students come to school to participate in reading activities. Encourage students to read at least fifteen minutes each day at home and record the minutes on a monthly calendar. Total the minutes for each class and graph the results where everyone can see. Set a goal for the school year with a special activity if the goal is met. If staff members work together, they should be able to brainstorm a number of interventions to improve reading instruction, even if there is not a reading specialist in the building.

Connections:
- Topic Area: Instruction; Module: Reading Acquisition
- Topic Area: Instruction; Module: Reading Comprehension