

UDL Classroom Perspectives: Teachers' Tips

Differentiating Through Groups, Centers and Stations

Using groups, centers or stations can be an effective way to delivery choices or variety in how students gain information and show what they know. There are many no-tech ways to provide a variety learning experiences through: 1) choices of hands-on learning, 2) options for student discourse, and 3) providing distinct choices for roles in each station or group. Technology can provide more flexibility to challenge and support diverse learners through mobile computers, netbooks, laptops and student response systems (e.g. ActivVotes). This can have a positive impact for both teachers and students regarding classroom management, coverage of material and student learning.

Technology - More is Not Always Better

- 1) Using one Activote, laptop or netbook per group can:
 - Decrease technical problem solving by the teacher, especially if it means a teacher has an extra unit to replace one that is not working
 - Decrease transition times if only one student needs to log into a device while others can begin no-tech tasks
 - Promote more student discourse by asking them to collaborate around one resource that is likely more engaging than paper
 - Promote development of more varied roles in the group with and without technology
- 2) Using headphone splitters to allow 2-4 students to listen to multimedia with headphones resources at each laptop or netbook. You can also plug more than one of them together to add more than additional students.
- 3) Free online survey or quiz tools (e.g. www.surveymonkey.com) or online documents (e.g. Google docs or forms) can allow student group work at a computer to be pulled up in real-time on the teacher computer or projection display (e.g. LCD projector, interactive whiteboard).



Use Pictures to Complement Text for Routines and Sequences

- 1) *Many students do not efficiently process text in busier classroom settings. Visuals can support more learners in establishing routines than you may think. **Make graphics or visuals clearly visible** when students come in so **they know which tools they will be using** (e.g. a picture of an ActivVote on the board if student need to obtain one), **the sequence of steps** (e.g. each station labeled with an image, an image for each step of station) and your **expectations for behavior**.*
- 2) Paper file folders with specific roles for groups or stations can be a good visual cue to get to a station and begin working immediately when they come in the classroom.



This Quick Guide was developed collaboratively by teachers on the Instructional Technology Leadership Teams at Lakelands Park MS, Rosa Parks MS and Tilden MS.

Routines Matter

Every detail of moving to, initiating and completing stations or groups with or without technology gets much quicker and more automatic for students and teachers with repetition. *This is especially true for technology routines.*

- 3) Consider establishing some routines related to groups or stations without technology first and then add the technology after transitions and expectations become somewhat established.
- 4) Start with fewer stations to start, maybe even one small learning station concurrent with larger whole group instruction.
- 5) Spread stations out over multiple days to decrease the amount of transitions and start-up times in a limited class period.
- 6) Introduce stations the day before you will have students complete them.
- 7) Plan time for students to log into wireless laptops or netbooks. Most of these will take between 3-5 minutes to completely log-in. If you turn them on in advance, you can save about 1-2 minutes since system updates will download even though they are not logged-in.
- 8) Build in tasks students can complete as they wait for units to log-in.
- 9) Continue with group instruction as they turn their screen towards the teacher so it is clear when log-in is complete
- 10) Research and establish a number of strategies to quickly group students in random or heterogeneous groups (e.g. online group makers like at www.superteachertools.com).
- 11) Establish routines **related to students choosing stations or groups**:
 - Color code paper and cards for each station or group with only enough to fill that station or group (rewards those who arrive early!)
 - Have sign-up sheets or sticks to place in a cup to request use of technology. Teachers can make adjustments to help students make better choices if needed or reserve options for certain students.



Be Clear About Your Instructional Intentions with Technology

- 1) Making something available in digital form on the computer (e.g. a PowerPoint student view and discuss in a small group) can make a significant difference in the level of student engagement and discourse *but recognize some potential pitfalls.*
- 2) **Ask questions about the materials you are providing for students to access with technology:**
 - Are they providing different ways for all learners to benefit from them and interact with them? For example, struggling readers have options for multimedia and digital text with read aloud tool or those who do not process auditory information well have options for reading.
 - Are you asking all learners to do thing in the same way even though technology is involved (e.g. audio recording is provided but options for visually reading text are absent)?
- 3) Ask students for feedback on groups or stations and how they helped them learn.

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