

RISING UP: ACTIVE LEARNING

Active Learning with Lesson Study
UNCF Liberal Arts Innovation Center



Volume II:
Lesson Study Team Articles

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SLOWING DOWN

Written by Dr. Rhonda Sutton, Knowledgeable Other

Slowing down the pace of anything creates space to really see what is right in front of you. It's like being in slow motion where time is slowed down so you can savor every moment. Slowing down is like being given a delicate object to hold and observe. You catch your breath as it's put in your hand. Your curiosity is piqued as you cradle the object ever so gently and examine it closely, activating all of your senses. You even hold your breath a little as if breathing will disrupt the moment. You carefully shift it so you can see it from every possible angle. You hold it up close to your eyes, not wanting to miss a thing. You notice the colors and how smooth or rough the surface is. You listen for any sounds it makes. You drink in every aspect of the object with wonder and awe that you get this experience. That's what it's like to slow down. Now imagine what would be possible for teaching and learning if teachers were able to slow down with wonder and awe. What would teachers need to step into a space of wonder and awe for teaching and learning? In lesson study, the teaching and learning process is slowed down to create space between stimulus-teaching, and response-learning. Space allows teachers to step outside of the process to see in new ways, to uncover the mysteries and surprises of teaching and learning. It is with a new view that teachers are able to shift perspectives and behaviors. A word of caution, shifting perspectives and behaviors exposes the most vulnerable parts of teachers-their needs, values, and goals. As such, this work requires compassion and empathy.

Before March 2020, when I facilitated professional learning for teachers the one common need request of teachers was always "more time". When I probed teachers about this request their response was always the same, "We are being asked to do more and more things during the school day and there isn't enough time".

Teachers are finding it hard to get everything in. They are held to tight timelines with no flexibility and are closely monitored for their adherence to the tight schedule. The tight timelines and the oversight bring on feelings of frustration, anxiety, and overwhelm, all emotions that lead to burnout. Since March 2020 these feelings have been compounded with a sense of helplessness as they grappled with the abrupt disruption to how we do school, the pivot to new ways to deliver instruction, and the stress of living in a pandemic. Research suggests that feelings of helplessness impact teachers' sense of control and their overall well-being (Goodwin & Shebby, 2021). As I reflect on our ways of being in school prior to the pandemic and during the pandemic, I see the request for more time as a plea for slowing down the time rather than adding more time to the day. This thought leaves me wondering. What's important about slowing down? What's possible for teaching and learning when teachers slow down?

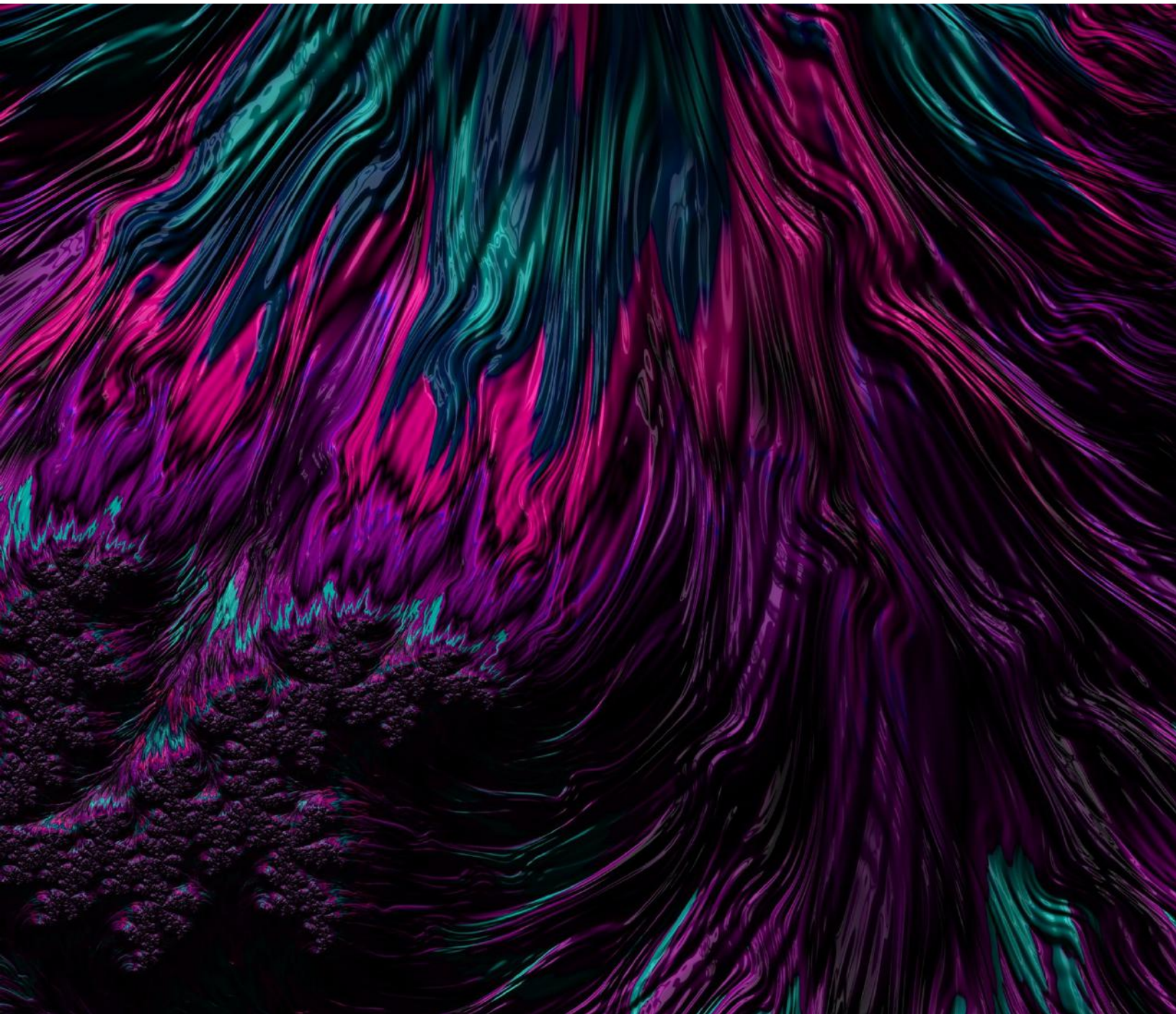
An initial step for engaging in lesson study is co-creating the space for perspective and behavior shifting to happen. Beginning the lesson study process by making space for teachers to shift perspectives and behaviors, sets the tone and intention of the process-centering teachers' needs, values, and who they are becoming, and the uncertainty of teaching and learning. Setting the tone and intention is like putting teachers in the driver's seat and re-establishing teachers' sense of efficacy. Co-creating a calm and safe space makes room for teachers to be seen and heard. It is in this space that teachers begin to learn who they are becoming. Space gives teachers permission to reconnect to the dream of the teacher they want to be. Creating space to slow down, teachers begin to tap into curiosity, openness, and acceptance of all that is possible.

Slowing Down (continued)

Teachers explore their values and the importance of their values to teaching and learning. Teaching and learning are uncertain because of the uniqueness of each teacher and student. Slowing down to tap into the uniqueness of teachers supports teachers in honing their awareness of students' unique gifts and talents. The space to consider needs, values, dreams, and possibilities lays the foundation for how teachers work together to examine a problem of practice that affects teaching and learning. Establishing a container in which teachers feel seen and heard is essential for teacher wellbeing and restoring teacher efficacy.

References

Goodwin, B. & Shebby, S. (2021). Restoring Teachers' Efficacy. *Educational Leadership*, 78 (4), 76-77.



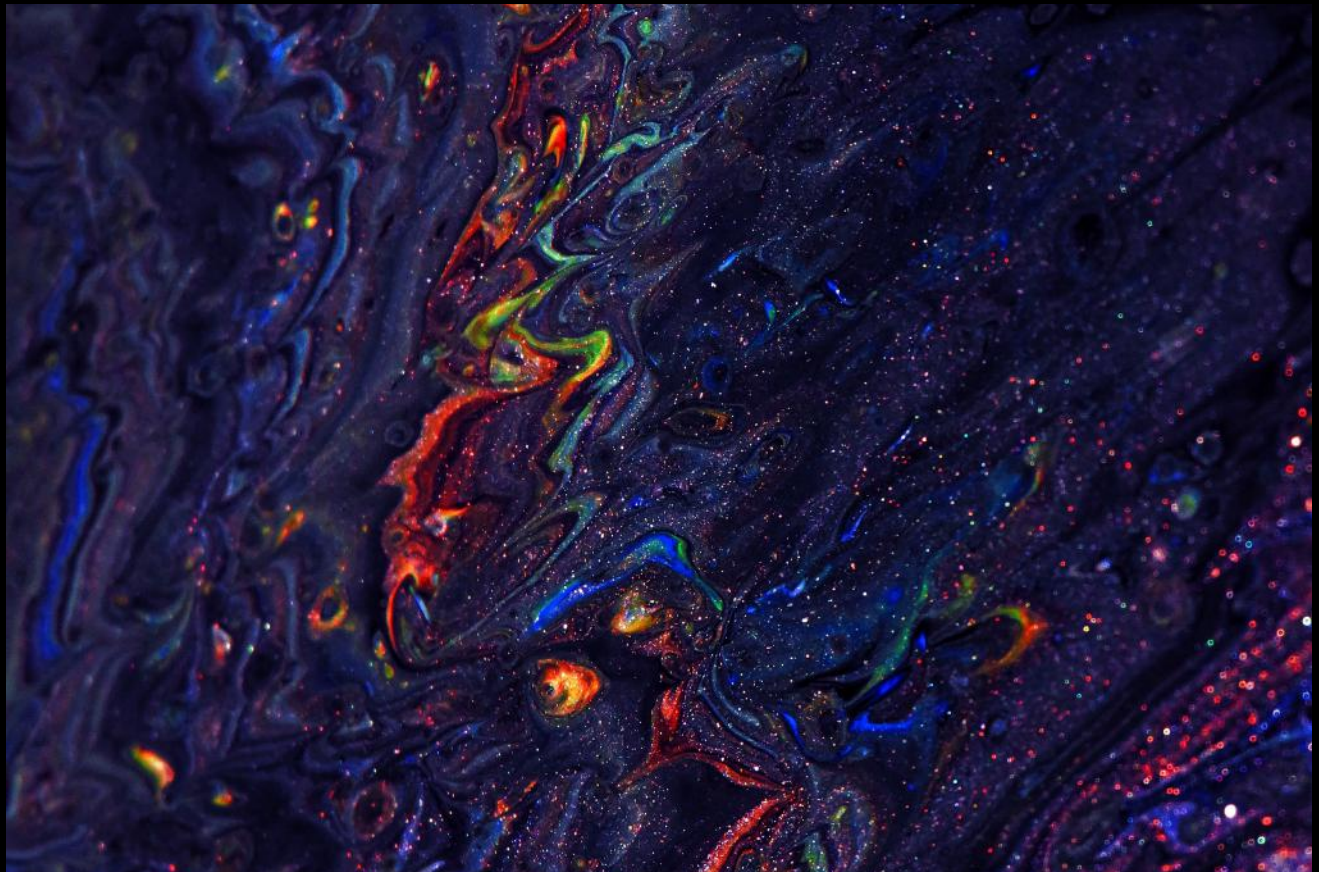
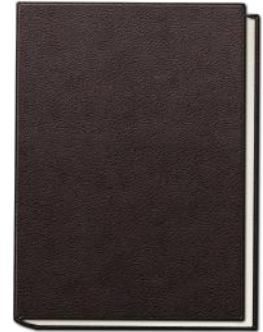
ACUE LESSON STUDY TEAM ARTICLES

In order to get to know our ACUE Lesson Study Team, each emagazine will feature topic articles based on the passion of the Lesson Study Team member.

Dr. Derrick Shapley, Talladega College Sociology Chair and member of the ACUE Lesson Study Team, sets the stage for considering instruction in the context of a pandemic.

The following article written by Tiffany Sayles, Talladega College Psychology Adjunct, writes about her passion regarding student and professor relationships.

Amanda Haywood-Cotton, Talladega College English professor and member of the ACUE Lesson Study Team, writes her teaching story. She shares her passion to learn the pedagogy of teaching English. Ms. Haywood-Cotton's dedication to guide students to love learning led her to find her digital Nemo.



Flexibility in an Online Learning Environment

*Written by Dr. Derrick Shapley,
Chair of Sociology*

The last year has shown that teachers must find new and innovative ways to adapt to rapid classroom changes. The Coronavirus has forced many colleges online for parts of semesters or even entire semesters. As professors, we dealt with many complaints and circumstances concerning the online learning environment. At Talladega College, we have a large percentage of first-generation college students. In our approach to students, we have maintained flexibility in our class delivery. Many students do not have access to the internet or computers that are readily available, so we must be flexible with deadlines. Many students' direct access to the internet is through the cellphone. We have also been flexible with how students have delivered the course assignments. Many students also still need a classroom environment even if they are not in the classroom. Providing zoom conference calls at flexible times has been essential to many students. Professors have also been available for conference calls during office hours and one on one meetings. Allowing vibrant discussion and professor feedback can still happen in an online environment if one is flexible to new ideas and thoughts. A professor being flexible should not mean they don't have high standards in the classroom.

You can maintain a flexible and fun learning environment while creating a structured learning environment by focusing on the students' needs. Our approach as professors should teach students as situations change, we all must adapt to a new understanding of the learning environment. By teaching students how to adapt we provide them skills they need for the job market and life. Colleagues who are successfully using ACUE strategies follow.



TEACHING TO REACH: RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Written by Tiffany Sayles, Professor of Psychology

Maya Angelou stated, “when you learn, teach”. For the past fifteen years, I have had the incredible opportunity to work within the educational field with students ranging from four years to adults. Watching the impressionable minds, especially of younger children, absorb vast amounts of information continues to amaze me. Over time I have discovered that students learn best from those with whom they have established a connection. Rita Pierson (2013) expressed that kids don’t learn from people they don’t like. I have found that the opposite is also true. When I invest the time and energy to connect with my students, they are open and willing to learn.

Teaching is an amazing art but as educators it is imperative that we teach to reach all students. Cerbin (2011), author of the Lesson Study book focused on College professors, stated “despite our daily experiences with students, we tend to know very little about how their learning takes place or how our teaching affects their learning”. I am excited to have the opportunity to embark upon a journey of learning more in depth ways to analyze and adjust my teaching practices through participation in our lesson study. In addition, relationship building remains the foundational necessity in the teaching-learning process. Therefore I seek continual growth in this area. Through my experience and professional development, I have discovered three effective ways to build relationships with my students- words, writing, and web-based experiences.

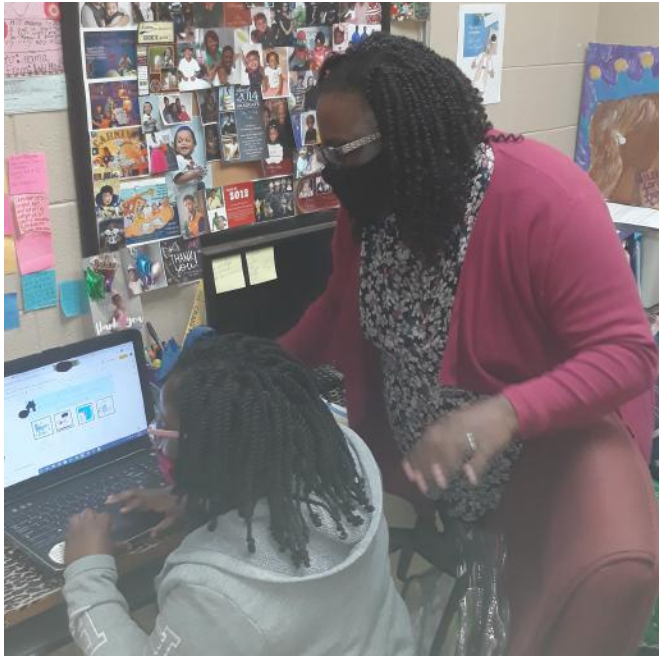
We cannot do anything in our traditional or online courses without the use of words. Our choice of words can build up or break down students of any age. Our words greatly influence and impact our relationships with students.

Denton (2008) explained five guiding principles for positive language which is beneficial for promoting positive relationships. I strive to be intentional with the words that I relay in my class announcements, personal emails, video messages, and all other communication with students. I want to ensure that I relay positive and encouraging words to them on a regular basis. When a student reaches out to me, I immediately respond with appreciation for their choice to communicate and connect with me. I desire for each student to feel seen and heard with positive regard even in difficult conversations.

Utilizing words to communicate can also be further explored through journal writing. In my Psychology of Personal Growth class, students have been assigned a self-reflection journal that corresponds to our weekly readings. The purpose of this journal is to enable students to bridge course content with their daily lives. Students are provided with weekly prompts in order to conduct applicable assessments and adjustments needed for educational and personal growth. Murray (2002) expounded that writing allows persons to interpret their experiences through written words. I am also better able to understand my students’ experience which affords me further insight and connection with each of them and improves the quality of my feedback and support.

In online learning, continuous communication and feedback are key in reaching students. Connections can build through words and writing. These tools can help to foster relationships especially when coupled with virtual classes and meetings. A recent training through Association of College and University Educators, ACUE, inspired me to implement this within my courses.

Teaching to Reach: Relationship Building (continued)



I added zoom meetings (web-based) as a weekly opportunity for me to connect with my students face to face and foster cohesiveness in our online classroom. During the meetings, we discuss our week at a glance and any questions or concerns, while learning more about one another. I want my presence to be consistent in our online learning community. I begin and end each session reminding students that we are in this together. Although I have no control over the current pandemic, I can control the level of support that I make available for all students.

Positive words, reflective writing, and web-based activities are only a few ways to connect and establish healthy relationships. There are a many other ways to accomplish this goal. The key is that we each remain open and teachable. As I learn from my colleagues the different strategies and methods to reach our students, I will continue to implement and teach those skills. I will also continue to remind all educators that while we can teach the best lessons with our expertise, our students must know our care and concern for them. Relationships help us to expand our reach as we teach.

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FINDING THE DIGITAL NEMO

Written by Amanda Haywood-Cotton, Professor of English

Teaching has been my passion since I was little! I remember using the back of my door, in our single-wide trailer, like a chalkboard, and my baby dolls were my students. As soon as I graduated from Gadsden State Community College, I enrolled at Jacksonville State University. When I told my mom that I wanted to get a bachelor's degree in English and teach, she told me that was a waste of time, and I needed to get a good old factory job and make money. That was the last time I talked to her about school.

At Jacksonville State University, I met with an advisor who informed me that I could never work a full-time Monday through Friday 7-4 job and earn a degree in Education. Quitting my 40 hour a week job was not an option, so I went over to the English department where another advisor told me I would never earn a B.A and work a full-time job. It took me six years to get that B.A, but I got it and the next semester I was enrolled in Graduate school and getting a divorce.

As much as I wanted that degree in Education, I was never able to quit my job, so I got my Master's in English. I honestly thought that by having a master's degree in English, public school would hire me. What was I thinking!?! However, I did not give up on my teaching dream! As soon as I graduated, I started sending out resumes to every local college.

In 2014, a year after I got my M.A., Dr. Rice called me and hired me as an English adjunct here at Talladega College. I taught college at night and worked my LabCorp job during the day.

During that time, I found God. I talked to Him and told Him of my passions, and He told me to send out my "seeds", aka resumes, to different secondary schools; however, not as a teacher, but as a secretary! I trusted God and did just that, and in 2018 the principal at Saks Middle School called me and hired me! God knew I needed that bridge to education because the medical field is very different than the education field.

In October of 2018, Dr. Blumer called and asked if I would be interested in teaching "temporary full time" at Talladega College. That was a scary offer!! The word temporary SCARES the heck out of me; however, I have trusted God and a year later I am still here!! Finally, I have achieved what SO MANY people said I would never achieve! I never had a cheerleader in my life, so I think that is why I tell my students that I will ALWAYS be their biggest cheerleader.

When I think back to that very first semester of my teaching career, I am reminded of why active leaning is important. I am reminded of why programs like ACUE are so important in the lives of educators. I am sad to say that my first semester, oh please lets just be honest, that entire year was a complete classroom failure. I had never taught in a classroom before. My full-time job was drawing blood in a medical lab. In my graduate classes, the content was explained to us, but we never learned teaching methods.

Finding the Digital Nemo (continued)

Soon, I was left in a classroom with first year college students, and I had no idea what to do with them. That first year was simply me flopping around like a fish out of water; however, I did not give up because I knew God had plans for me! Those six years of adjunct work sharpened my content skills and gave me a slight insight to what teaching was all about; however, it was not until my first semester as a fulltime teacher that I started thinking about the actual meaning of active teaching.

I truly thought active teaching was me standing in front of my students lecturing and then praying they understood what I was talking about. My teaching savior came to me totally by coincidence, and I bet she didn't even realize, at that point in time, that I needed "teaching saving"!

Boy did I ever! I have really no idea why my teaching savior decided to give me the opportunity to join her group of amazing teachers, but she did, and here I am. Then she asked me to think about writing an article about active teaching. I was blown away. What can I bring to that table? Absolutely nothing; however, I can bring with me the knowledge that we do need active learning in the classroom.

My students long for active learning. The days of sitting behind a desk and teaching straight content is gone. My students are from the age of Apple, Facebook and Tiktok. Their minds have been plugged into some sort of technology since birth. We, as educators, must get with the program and learn to be active and keep their active minds learning.



WHAT'S NEXT?

UNCF-Talladega College Public Research Lesson Study Team

Rebecca McKay

Rebecca Robinson, Michelle Bridgewater, Yulanda Clinton

As you read *Rising Up: Active Learning with Lesson Study*, the UNCF-Talladega College Public Research Lesson Study Team encourages you to follow our path and enter into the process of continuous professional learning at the What & Why? stage shown at the top of the graphic here and ask: What is the focus of our work with future educators? and Why is this our focus?

