



Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a new way of looking at educating children and adults. It is a framework for designing learning environments that help ALL students gain knowledge, skills, and enthusiasm for learning. The concept of UDL was inspired by the universal design concept for product development and architecture, which anticipates the needs of individuals with disabilities and makes plans to accommodate these needs from the outset. Buildings with wide doorways and lever door handles allow access for all people whether they have a disability or not. In the context of learning, universal design uses instructional materials, teaching methods and assessments that are designed from the outset to be accessible to all students, whether they have a disability or not. The goal of UDL is improved educational outcomes for all students due to built-in supports and barrier-free resources.

Three principles of UDL:

1. Provide multiple and flexible methods of presentation to give students various ways of acquiring information and knowledge. Hi-tech examples: digital books, specialized software. Lo-tech examples: highlighted handouts, overheads with highlighted text, and cards with tactile or color-coded ink.
2. Provide multiple and flexible means of expression to give students alternatives ways to demonstrate what they have learned. Hi-tech examples: online concept mapping software, speech-to-text programs. Lo-tech examples: asking students to demonstrate learning in small groups, oral tests.
3. Provide multiple and flexible means of engagement to develop students' interests, challenge them appropriately, and motivate them to learn. Hi-tech examples: interactive software, recorded readings. Lo-tech examples: games or songs, peer tutors.

More Examples of UDL:

- Building accessibility into design helps to ensure that features meeting the needs of the widest range of students are incorporated into the curricula. Such designs can prevent the need for adaptations or retrofitting. For example, electronic material that is designed to be compatible with assistive technology devices allows for easy programming of these devices.
- Providing adaptable materials and media allows students to choose and customize formats suited to their learning needs. For example, using digitized text, students can change text to speech, speech to text, font size, colors, and highlighting.
- Providing challenging and age-appropriate materials to all students motivates those who may not otherwise be able to access grade-level curriculum. For example, a student with a learning disability can use text-to-speech features incorporated into digitized history or science books.

Sources:

US Dept of Education Office of Special Ed Programs: <http://www.osepideasthatwork.org/UDL/intro.asp>
UDL Fact sheet: <http://ndss.org/images/stories/NDSSresources/pdfs/udlfactsheet.pdf>

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