Chapter 12

Universal Design for Learning: A Framework for Supporting Effective Literacy Instruction

Jodi Pilgrim
University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, USA

A. Kris Ward
University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, USA

ABSTRACT

An inclusive curriculum values diversity and addresses barriers to academic success. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) introduces a framework for inclusive instruction, which transforms the systems and structures in schools to help make learning more effective and efficient for all students. Because Universal Design supports the literacy component of classroom design (Rose & Meyer, 2006), this chapter provides insight into instructional strategies that reinforces these essential skills. This chapter offers the background and framework for UDL, including research-based literacy instruction which ensures materials are accessible through multiple forms of representation, expression, and engagement of information.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusion of all students from a wide array of abilities is a unique challenge in the classroom. Children have various needs that must be addressed in order to achieve success, and policy developments continue to support the right of every student to access general curriculum and participate in an inclusive classroom (Florian, 2012). Diane Richler, past president of Inclusion International stated, “Inclusion is not a strategy to help people fit into the systems and structures which exist in our society; it is about transforming those systems and structures to make it better for everyone. Inclusion is about creating a better world for everyone” (Inclusive Fitness Coalition, 2015, para. 1). Universal Design for Learning (UDL) introduces a framework for inclusive instruction, which transforms the systems and structures in schools to help make learning more effective and efficient for all students. While UDL utilizes a cross-disciplinary framework, this chapter specifically examines reading instruction through the UDL lens.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-2520-2.ch012
Success in school is dependent upon efficient reading and comprehension skills. However, “the typical curriculum — usually centered on printed materials — is designed for a homogeneous group of students and is not able to meet different learner needs” (Ralabate, 2011, para. 4). UDL promotes intentional planning and modified materials, personalized to the needs of each student. Through a UDL lens, educators can identify the strengths, needs, and interests of individual students across UDL’s three learning networks. (i.e., recognition, action and expression, engagement). This chapter provides the background and framework for UDL and research-based reading instruction as it relates to inclusive practices.

BACKGROUND

Differentiated instruction addresses students’ diverse and unique strengths as well as their challenges. Inclusive practices rely on four primary principles: 1.) Equal access for all learners; 2.) Sensitivity to strengths and challenges; 3.) Reflective practices and differentiated instruction; and 4.) Established community where collaboration among those involved is essential (Salend, 2011, p. 8). According to Salend (2011), the movement toward inclusion was fostered by the application of Universal Design principles to educational settings. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a movement that reflects a world that is accessible and usable to a greater portion of the population, including those with disabilities (Ralabate, 2011). The concept of UDL can be equated with the design of a building. Adaptations, such as ramps and elevators, provide access for those with mobility challenges in a physical building. Just as buildings must be adapted for accessibility, the school curriculum must be adapted to meet all learners’ needs. With UDL, teachers design lessons in such a way that all learners can access the material, engage interest, and express knowledge. As a result of intentional planning with universal materials to meet a variety of learning needs, all students gain access to the curriculum, creating an inclusive environment.

One of the challenges for educators is to provide learning opportunities in the general-education curriculum that are inclusive and effective for all students (Ralabate, 2011). Teachers encounter varied reading levels in the classroom. For example, a fourth-grade teacher may have a classroom of students ranging from non-readers to high school reading levels. Supporting the needs of all learners sounds like a simple and common-sense goal, but the question for educators is how to design reading instruction for a diverse classroom of students, especially when for many children, reading ability is a barrier to learning. Effective reading instruction helps all learners make sense of written language. Students access curriculum through exposure to a variety of written mediums which may need adapting for accessibility. Literacy instruction is the responsibility of all teachers, regardless of the subject taught. In 1999, the International Reading Association issued a statement that reflected the need for a focus on adolescent literacy:
Related Content

New Mindsets: The Promise of Employing Adult Learning and Development for Educational Leaders’ Learning
www.igi-global.com/chapter/new-mindsets/106309?camid=4v1a

Ethno-Science and Globalization
www.igi-global.com/chapter/ethno-science-and-globalization/208777?camid=4v1a

Enabling Professional Development with E-Portfolios: Creating a Space for the Private and Public Self
www.igi-global.com/article/enabling-professional-development-portfolios/61399?camid=4v1a

Addressing Emotions within E-Learning Systems
www.igi-global.com/chapter/addressing-emotions-within-learning-systems/20831?camid=4v1a