



Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is “an educational approach to teaching, learning, and assessment, drawing on new brain research and new media technologies to respond to individual learner differences,” according to the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST). The purpose of UDL is to improve students’ access to the general curriculum.

UDL has three main principals:

1. Provide multiple, flexible methods of presentation.

This principal applies to how the curriculum is designed and what teaching methods are used to present it. For example, information is presented in a variety of ways (not just lecture) that involve multiple senses.

2. Provide multiple, flexible methods of action and expression.

Students should be able to demonstrate what they have learned in a variety of ways, such as multiple choice tests, essays, oral exams, etc.

3. Provide multiple, flexible options for engagement.

Engagement means giving students the right degree of challenge and motivation. Some students may need little structure and support, while others may require more direction and guidance.

In a UDL classroom, the focus is on flexibility and alternatives. Consequently, there is no “one right way” to do it and no two classrooms will look the same. In all cases, however, the goal is to present information in a variety of ways such as group work, hands-on activities and multimedia presentations. Technology, which can eliminate many barriers to learning, is often used.

When applying UDL techniques, curriculum designers and teachers must consider all types of diversity, such as, individual skills, learning styles and preferences, gender, culture, abilities, and disabilities. The following techniques can help all students to participate and learn:

- Room and equipment should be physically accessible to all students
- Information should be presented using large visual and tactile aids
- The curriculum content should be made relevant to the students’ lives
- Content should be presented without using unnecessary jargon or complexity and should accommodate a wide variety of language skills
- Computer software and Web sites should be accessible to all students, including those using assistive technology

- Flexible, digital curricula should include such things as study questions, chapter outlines, vocabulary lists, and background information.
- Student should be given ongoing feedback and opportunities to make corrections
- Assessments should have minimal time constraints, when appropriate

Parents do not always have control over what curriculum is used in their child's classroom. They can, however, take steps to help promote UDL in their child's school.

Parents can ask their child's teachers if they are familiar with the concept of UDL. They can make sure their child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) includes related goals that will give their child the same access to the curriculum as other students.

UDL helps all students, with and without disabilities, to access, participate in, and progress in the general curriculum. By embedding alternatives and flexibility into the curriculum, students are able to learn and show their knowledge in a variety of ways that match their unique learning styles. UDL removes barriers so students are more able to reach their full potential.

Adapted From: *A Parent's Guide to Universal Design for Learning (UDL)*. Pacer Center, 2006.

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