

Chapter 10

Best Practices Implementing Special Education Curriculum and Common Core State Standards using UDL

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a model for collaboration between general education and special education teachers using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to align common core state standards with instruction for students with special needs. A history of how UDL came to be and how it is now a strategic tool to support all learners is explored. Best practices are offered as supportive instructional strategies. An example of how UDL can be aligned with Common Core State Standards and the goal(s) found in an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) will also be provided. This model supports collaboration between general education and special education teachers in an effort to ensure that general education curriculum can be accessed by students with special needs.

INTRODUCTION

In the 2014-2015 academic year, 45 states began full implementation of Common Core State Standards. These standards were developed to transform American public education (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices [NGA Center] and Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO]). Specifically, the Common Core State Standards identify the key knowledge and skills that teachers must cover in the classroom. These key knowledge and skills are the foundation of state assessments which will provide evidence of student preparedness to be career and college ready (Conley, 2011).

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One of the critical points of conversation during the development, adoption and implementation of CCSS for state LEA's was the need to ensure "students with disabilities are challenged to excel within the general education curriculum and be prepared for success in their post-school lives, including college and/or careers" (San Diego County Office of Education, 2013, np). This increased the urgency for special education teachers and school administrators to understand the CCSS and how they differ from prior standards (Shaefer, 2014; Staskowski, 2012). Additionally, the challenge to link individualized education programs (IEP) for students with disabilities directly to the grade level standards in CCSS has increased the challenge of special education teachers and school administrators. Student IEP's tied to standards is not new, it has been a requirement of federal law for well over a decade, but it continues to be a work in progress with the ongoing change and evolution of K-12 education. The CCSS initiative expects all students to meet grade level standards, but it does not address the specifics of writing IEP's. How to meld special education's mandate of individualized instruction with the goal of CCSS has been a struggle. Educators worry about unreasonable expectations as well as the concern that the focus on standards may crowd out some of the very important functional training students with disabilities may need (Samuels, 2010).

In an effort to increase access to general education curriculum for learners with disabilities, it is critical that teachers understand the barriers excluding these learners from access to the curriculum. This chapter will introduce the model Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a means for collaboration between special education and general education teachers as they work towards aligning IEP goals with CCSS to design curriculum supporting student needs. Universal Design for Learning has become popular in recent years being defined quite simply as the planning of teaching and learning strategies to meet the needs of a broader population of students with diverse learning styles and abilities (Kurtts et al., 2009; Pisha & Coyne, 2001). The process of UDL provides teachers the means to remove preexisting barriers which may exist in curriculum, providing learners with a means to access and engage in the curriculum (Rose & Mayer, 2002; Orkwis & McLane, 1998). The principals of UDL foster student engagement, representation and evaluation in multiple ways, thereby lending itself to appropriately designing IEP goals complete with all three required components of time, task and measurement intact.

Much of the premise of UDL is based on brain research and how brain waves interact during higher order thinking processes. "What is most significant about our brains is not the band of neurons themselves, but the astonishing interconnectivity between them" (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014, p. 52). Going deeper into investigating cognitive mapping and the brain, we can explore Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy or Depth of Knowledge. More will be uncovered to support UDL as a tool for aligning CCSS with IEP goals in regard to theorists just mentioned, but for now, a strong case has to be made for the "how to" incorporation of UDL in the Education Specialist's classroom to make certain CCSS and the student's with special needs IEP is being addressed.

Going deeper into the meaning of UDL and CCSS, one has to reach back several decades when the Center for Applied Special Technology determined that learning had to be learner centered and curriculum needed to be changed for the learner to grasp rather than the other way around. The learner did not need to change in order to penetrate the curriculum. Hence access to learning was a concept developed by CAST early on; developing a system that would remove barriers to learning! (Wakefield, 2011).

"Standards driven reform is a means of closing the achievement gap between enfranchised groups and disenfranchised (including special needs-groups) according to Fuchs et al, 2010 (as cited in Cash, 2006, p. 303). What Education Specialists are looking for is a formula, a template if you will, that allows them to align CCSS with each student's IEP goals. This becomes even more crucial when the site

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