


Chapter 1

Universal Design for Learning, Media Literacy, and Repeated Measures in Inclusion Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

This chapter highlights the role of universal design for learning in inclusive classrooms. How teachers design instruction to meet the diverse needs of all learners in inclusion classrooms is where the importance of universal design for learning lies. UDL is the “what,” “how,” and “why” of learning; its principles provide for multiple means of engaging students, multiple representations of instructional methods and materials, multiple types of student responses, and multiple means of evaluating performance. Presented from the context of multiple literacies including media literacy, this chapter explains how UDL can be applied in the classroom in concert with response to intervention, mastery learning, and repeated measures strategies. This chapter strongly argues the utility of using universal design for learning and its benefits for teaching in inclusion classrooms.

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INTRODUCTION

Universal Design for Learning Integral to Successful Inclusion for All Students

This chapter strongly underscores the importance of understanding and implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) strategies in inclusive classrooms to positively impact student performance. UDL provides a framework for teachers that will enable them to learn how to maximize what is possible instructionally for students with and without IEPs. As classrooms in the 21st Century become more technologically dependent, developing media literacy skills in all students is necessary for long term success and is a naturalistic extension of the UDL process. Grounded in research of learner differences and effective instructional settings, UDL principles call for varied and flexible ways to present or access information (the “what” of learning), plan and execute learning tasks (the “how” of learning) and engage with the material (the “why” of learning) (Al Hazmi & Amad, 2018). According to Michael and Trenzek (2006), “These principles not only add to the richness and effectiveness of teaching critical and complex academic content, but provide students with choices about how they learn, how they share what they have learned, and how they are ultimately assessed” (p. 313). In these ways, UDL helps meet physical and cognitive challenges by modifying instructional materials, adapting techniques and strategies, and varying technologies that empower educators to meet students’ diverse needs.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act [IDEIA] (2004) mandates that all students must have access to the general education environment to the maximum extent possible. Decisions to include students with intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, attention deficits, emotional and behavioral disorders and autism spectrum disorders are dependent upon a given student’s academic levels of function, behavioral needs, and use of assistive technologies. For students who may have more mild to moderate academic and behavioral needs, placement in general education is typical of inclusive school practices across the country. Key to making inclusive placements successful is determining what types and levels of support and staffing are required, what instructional strategies would be most useful, and how Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can provide the structure for individualized instruction.

Typical inclusive classrooms where students with and without disabilities are placed most often have two teachers, a general education teacher and a special education teacher, working collaboratively, using an array of co-teaching models (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain & Shamberger, 2010) and differentiation of instruction (Tomlinson, 2001). Instructional planning and delivery can be very challenging for inclusion teachers in making sure that they meet the various needs of their general education students, along with the needs of their special education students, who have detailed individualized education plans (IEP). Given that addressing the instructional needs of students with IEPs including specific modifications and accommodations can be daunting, working at the same time to ensure that general education students are also having their needs met requires a great deal of planning. This is where UDL comes in. According to the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE, 2016), UDL principles provide: multiple means of engaging students in instruction; multiple representations of instructional methods and materials; multiple types of student responses; and multiple means of evaluation. “UDL transforms one-size-fits-all instruction into diverse, multiple and accessible learning opportunities that embrace student variation” (Dalton, 2017, p. 17).

One of the advantages of the UDL approach is that its application not only serves special education students, but all learners in the classroom. Because UDL can be implemented with students across a broad range of academic needs, its utility as a broad-based classroom instructional approach is quite

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