

The Enactment of the Principles of UDL in Practice in an Irish Post–Primary English Classroom: A Snapshot

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Due to the relative newness of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in post-primary education in Ireland, there is a lack of examples that show teachers how the principles of UDL work in practice. This chapter addresses this gap through providing snapshots of learning, teaching, and assessment through the lens of representation, engagement, and action and expression. These snapshots take place in two junior cycle English classrooms. The teachers describe the goal and tasks of the lessons,

take the reader through their UDL planning and actions, and finally reflect—and invite—student reflection on the lessons.

INTRODUCTION

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a relatively new concept in early childhood, primary, and post-primary education in Ireland (Flood & Banks, 2021). Efforts to embed UDL in learning and teaching in further and higher education are more established due to the work of the Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) and the training authority SOLAS in supporting educators develop inclusive practices in response to increasingly diverse student populations. The momentum has been slower in primary and at post-primary with arguments that there needs to be a focus on research evidence, analyzing examples of UDL in practice and their outcomes (Edyburn, 2005; Capp, 2017; Flood & Banks, 2021). This chapter begins to address this gap within the Irish context. It offers two snapshots in time of learning, teaching and assessment using a UDL approach in the junior cycle English classroom in a mainstream post-primary school in Ireland. The principles of engagement, representation, and action and expression permeated through both snapshots. However, for the purpose of this chapter, Snapshot One focuses on engagement and representation over two lessons in Second Year, and Snapshot Two focuses on action and expression over a unit of work in Third Year.

BACKGROUND

In Ireland, post primary education is divided into two stages: junior cycle and senior cycle. Junior cycle is the lower secondary stage of compulsory education and is guided by the *Framework for Junior Cycle* (DES, 2015). The introduction of this framework was a new departure for Irish education in that it sought to incorporate a shared understanding of how teaching, learning, and assessment practices should support “the delivery of a quality, inclusive and relevant education that will meet the needs of junior cycle students” (p. 6). The framework is guided by twenty-four statements of learning, eight principles, and eight key skills that are at the core of all subject specifications.

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