Universal Design for Learning Overview

This video is intended to provide an overview of Universal Design for Learning, or UDL. UDL is a framework that can inform the design of instruction and assessment to ensure access to learning for ALL students.

As we make decisions about teaching and learning, including decisions about assessment, we should start by considering the needs of all students, recognizing that one size cannot fit all. For example, continually ask yourself, "How will I provide access not only for my English language learners, students with disabilities, and other struggling learners, but also my academically advanced students?"

Let's begin with a short overview of the Universal Design for Learning lesson-planning framework.

Simply put, UDL is a set of three principles for curriculum development that provide all students equal access and flexible opportunities to learn.

The three principles are:

- Multiple Means of Student Engagement,
- Multiple Ways of Representation of information
- and Multiple Options for Action and Expression

UDL allows teachers to identify possible barriers in the curriculum and teach around them while providing flexible approaches that can be customized and adjusted for individual student needs.

In other words, implementation of the UDL principles rejects the idea that a single one-size-fits-all solution will work for all students.

Universal Design for Learning is rooted in the same philosophy as Universal Design for Architecture.

Think in terms of curb cutouts, escalators, or closed captioning and the accessibility they provide in our physical environment, not only for individuals for whom they were designed, but also the general population as a whole.

The same holds true in our educational environment — we need to ensure that instruction is accessible in the goals we set for students, the assessments we administer to students, and the methods and materials that are provided throughout instruction.

In order to achieve accessibility for all students, we can refer back to the three principles of Universal Design for Learning which are based on the latest neuroscience cognitive research. Let's take a closer look at each of the three principles.

Principle number one, providing multiple means of student engagement, is in many ways the most important principle.

We must "hook" our students with our instruction. If we don't motivate them, make connections to real life experiences, or recruit their interest, it won't matter how brilliant our academic instruction is.

The second principle, providing multiple means of representation, is how we present information to students so they can connect it to their prior knowledge.

One example is using manipulatives in math to symbolically represent numbers. Additionally, we can present information either auditorily or visually or both. We can highlight information we would like students to note as important.

We can also activate students' background knowledge, the goal being that students take information they have already mastered and generalize that into new learning.

The third principle is providing multiple means of action and expression.

Students vary greatly in the ways they respond to instruction, including through assistive technology, through drawing, and through writing.

Also within principle number three are the ways in which students access their executive functions, meaning how do they prioritize, how do they organize information, how do they take steps to meet the goals that they've set for themselves?

In the larger scheme of things, we aren't only providing access to learning for all students, we are also creating what, in UDL terms, is described as expert learners who are purposeful and motivated, resourceful and knowledgeable, and strategic and goal directed.

In so doing, students will be better prepared to meet the demands of college and of the 21st century workforce.