

Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is based on the belief that the curriculum not the student, needs to change. UDL helps students with and without disabilities be successful in the classroom.

Universal Design for Learning has its roots in architecture. Architects have realized it is easier to design buildings from the beginning that were accessible instead of trying to remodel them later. After-the-fact building changes are often awkward and expensive. Ron Mace, the architect who originated universal design advises individuals to consider the needs of the broadest possible range of users from the start. People have come to learn that universal design solutions for buildings and communities benefited all citizens.

How does this relate to schools?

Curricula writers can consider the range of student needs in classrooms from the beginning. When the curricula has built in flexibility for how the concepts and skills are presented, how students will show what they have learned, and how learners will be motivated, teachers need to use fewer accommodations and modifications later. The built in alternatives are valuable to all the students.

Universal Design for Learning can encompass many initiatives: integrated units, multi-sensory teaching, differentiated instruction, multiple intelligences, performance based assessments, and others. The intent of UDL is not just to make information accessible, but also to make learning accessible.

There are three main principles of UDL:

1. Multiple, flexible methods of presentation (input): teacher uses a variety of methods and materials to present information to students.
Examples that teachers might do: support student's background knowledge, emphasize critical features of a concept or skill, include visual aids, use books at different reading levels, demonstrate use of graphic organizers, and have a variety of media and formats (CD, Braille, captioned videos)
2. Multiple, flexible methods of expression (output): students can demonstrate what they have learned in a variety of ways.
Examples that teachers might do: offer choice of written or oral reports, allow use of word processors with word prediction, present tiered assignments (parallel tasks at varied levels), give choice of computer presentations, and utilize portfolio assessments
3. Multiple, flexible options for engagement (process): teacher gives students the right amount of challenge and motivation.

Examples that teachers might do: provide choices of group work or to work independently, develop web quests (use internet to find answers), introduce guided notes, give students choices of topics to study

Benefits of Universal Design for Learning

- Helps all students to achieve in the general education classroom
- Enables students to demonstrate what they know
- Removes unnecessary barriers to learning so all students are more able to reach their full potential