Midterm Paper: Universal Design for Learning

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Universal Design for Learning

In order to be a successful teacher, one must plan out effective strategies in order to allow all students in the class to learn effectively. Each student deserves an equal opportunity to learn, however, there are many who have individualized needs, such as gifted children, children with special needs, etc. In order to accommodate all students, teachers should follow the Universal Design for Learning to meet specific standards. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a set of principles that "provides a blueprint for creating instructional goals, methods, materials, and assessments that work for everyone" (National Center on Universal Design for Learning, 2014). The concept of UDL allows all students to successfully learn, instead of just teaching lessons that are beneficial to the "average" student. This allows teachers to incorporate lessons into their curriculum that are flexible and can be adjusted to accommodate to the needs of diverse learners in his or her class. Since UDL was originated in the 1990's, it has come a long way to establish fairness and opportunities for all students.

As a future teacher, it is significant to look into the benefits of UDL, how to incorporate it into the classroom, why it is beneficial in the classroom, and the role of technology in UDL. I plan to implement UDL into my daily lessons in my future classroom. One way to do this is to provide multiple means of representation for options for perception. This could be done by offering alternatives for the way teachers present both auditory and visual information to the class. Another way to incorporate UDL into the classroom is to provide options for language, mathematical expressions and symbols through clarification, supporting decoding of text and mathematical notation, promoting understanding across languages and illustrating through media. A third way to implement UDL is to provide options for comprehension. Teachers could do this by providing

background knowledge to their students, pointing out big ideas in a lesson, and guiding information processing and visualization. It is important for students to use UDL to students' advantage by providing students with many "options for learning and symbols". Teachers can do this by embedding vocabulary in an effective way because "embedding language development into authentic tasks is much more effective than isolated vocabulary building or dictionary look-up exercises that are typically used in other curricula" (Rose, Gravel, & Domings, 2009, p.5). UDL should be infused into classrooms because it breaks barriers to learning by providing many methods for effective instruction in the classroom.

With the increasing use of technology in our society, technology has begun to have a large impact in the classroom in an attempt to benefit all learners. UDL includes the use of assistive technology (AT). Assistive technology is "modern technology [that] is employed at the level of the individual student to help him or her overcome barriers in the curriculum and living environments… it helps increase, improve, or maintain the functional capabilities of students with disabilities… and can be carefully engineered, fitted, and adapted to the specific strengths and weaknesses of each person" (Rose, Hasselbring, Stahl, & Zabala, n.d., 508, 509). Assistive technology can be defined as either "high-tech" or "low-tech", depending on how complex the type of technology is and how the technology is used to enhance a student's learning. High-tech items include computer screen intensifiers, electronic mobility switches, and electronic sign language dictionaries. Low-tech items include canes, wheelchairs, eyeglasses, and pencil grips. An example of a way to incorporate assistive technology into the classroom could be by using an iPad for guided access. "Guided access helps students with autism or other

attention and sensory challenges stay on task (Apple Inc., 2017). One product that I created that could be used as assistive technology would be Kahoot!. This product is an interactive way for students to memorize and learn information in a way that keeps it interesting for them. Kahoot! allows teachers to create quizzes and games for students online that help students learn new content in a way that can benefit them. Although different students may be at different learning capabilities, all of these items can help enhance students' learning.

Universal Design for Learning is extremely important because diverse learners exist in every school around the world. This approach recognizes the needs of each and every student and takes notice of the students' differences. UDL should be used by teachers to aid in accommodating each child's unique way of learning. Incorporating technology into the classroom will make a difference in all students' lives and it will ultimately enhance every students' quality of learning. As a future educator, it is crucial to be aware that the UDL curriculum "is not simply to help students master a specific body of knowledge or a specific set of skills, but to help them master learning itself – in short, to become expert learners" (National Center on Universal Design for Learning, 2014). As a teacher, one will encounter many kinds of diverse learners and UDL is an approach that acknowledges the needs of all learners and their differences.

References

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