Time to Go!: Unlocking Doors to the Next Generation of Learners Through Effective UDL Implementation

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Abstract

This presentation highlights a previously published phenomenological study that explored the understanding, experience, and application of UDL methodology among teacher candidates enrolled in a special and elementary education dual licensure program. The emerging themes from the study demonstrated that teacher candidates' understanding and application of UDL were promoted by the UDL training received through modeling and implementation in supervised clinical field experiences. This presentation will focus on the UDL resources and tools that are ready to be demonstrated, modeled, and implemented in K-12 classrooms and higher education classrooms. Types of UDL tools, demonstrations, and modeling strategies will be presented and discussed with the session participants.

Keywords

UDL implementation, higher education, teacher candidates, resources, tools, and modeling.

INTRODUCTION

Students with disabilities in K-12 education have increasingly gained access to the general curriculum with their typically developing peers in the general education classroom (Jassen, 1998; Sindelar et al., 2006). This recent educational trend is set by the educational laws and their reauthorizations such as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, and High Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008 establishing educational standards and prioritization of academic achievements among all learners with varied abilities, including students with and without disabilities (Meo, 2008; U.S. ED, 2004, 2010, n.d.). Therefore, it is essential teachers acquire the knowledge and skills to remove learning barriers, ensuring all learners have full access to the curriculum in their teaching practices. Application of the UDL principles makes it possible to remove preexisting learning barriers in the curriculum and give all learners access to the curriculum (Rose & Mayer, 2002; Orkwis & McLane, 1998). Strengthening these points addressing the benefits of applying UDL principles to instruction, Rao and Meo (2016) also suggest applying UDL principles to the design of curriculum and instruction when implementing standard-based lessons.

ISSUES AFFECTING TEACHER EDUCATION

IDEA (2004) and HEOA (2008) define Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and regulate the implementation of UDL in educational programs in order to guide and facilitate high expectations for learners and their academic outcomes. However, issues affecting teacher instruction and student learning in are inevitable due to lack of research in an area of UDL (Edyburn, 2010), the challenges to adopt and apply UDL principles among teachers (Koutering, McClannon, & Braziel, 2005), and the misconceptions of UDL and evidence-based practices among teachers (Basham & Marino, 2013; Meo, 2008).

PREVENTIONS AS SOLUTIONS

To overcome these problems, it is essential teacher candidates understand and apply UDL principles in order to make instruction and curriculum accessible to students with varied academic needs. For this reason, more research on effective teacher training of UDL principles and applications is essential (Spooner, Baker, Harris, Ahlgrim-Delzell, & Browder, 2007). Areas of research such as: training teacher and teacher candidates on UDL through models and demonstrations; their understanding of UDL through the training; and their application of UDL to the real classroom, are critical for facilitating access to general education curriculum for learners with varied abilities. This research includes examination of teacher candidates' perceptions toward UDL principles and applications to their field-based teaching experiences. This Narrative explores ways to support teacher's understanding and application of UDL principles in their real classroom settings.

UDL AND MODES OF COMMUNICATION

Through lesson planning, teachers consider multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression to incorporate UDL principles into their teaching and learning activities (CAST, 2018). This is because they understand the importance of activating learners' cognitive process of the why, what, and how of learning (CAST, 2018). A question that teachers may have is "how can we actually do UDL in the classroom?" In the field of foreign language education, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (2018) presents three modes of communication such as interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational modes. Interpersonal communication is a two-way communication, unlike interpretive and presentational modes that are one-way communication (ACTFL, 2015). Considering UDL principles and modes of communication in a classroom, Figure 1 shows a conceptualization of input and output sources for interactive learning in the classroom. Seven actions such as seeing, reading, listening, speaking, writing, smelling, touching, and tasting can be an interactive learning process for learners while teachers present multiple means of representation as well as action and expression. The next five actions such as seeing, reading, listening, smelling, touching, and tasting are input with varied representations provided by a teacher as a one-way communication mode. The last four actions, writing, speaking, preparing, and creating are broadly categorized strategies for helping students show what they know through action and expression. Throughout these learning actions, teachers make these activities accessible for learner engagements. Figure 1 shows one idea of how teachers can actually do UDL through interactive learning in their classrooms.
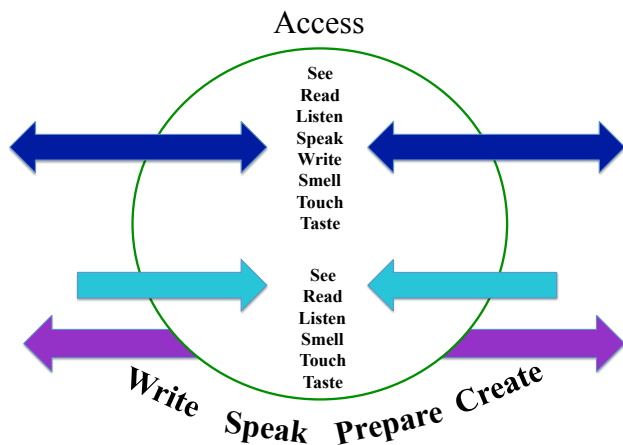
Figure 1. Conceptualization of input and output sources for interactive learning.

BUILDING TOGETHER

In workshops and professional development sessions designed for practitioners, we often hear voices from teachers often request an introduction to practical UDL tools which are easy to implement in their classrooms. As we continue to build our community of UDL, we must recognize the importance of fostering practitioners who actually apply UDL principles in the classroom. Practitioners apply UDL theory, putting the principles into practice in their classrooms every day. To sustain their efforts, it is essential to provide ample support that will prepare and enable in-service teachers and teacher candidates. We will continue our discussion and networking with colleagues from different disciplines, of our ideas and questions related to uses of technology resources, as well as the theories, research, practices, and resources in preparing professionals through UDL training. In this way, we can sustain our understanding of support, resources, procedures, benefits, and challenges related to understanding and implementing UDL that reflect new generations of leaners.

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