Universal Design for Learning

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework is a proactive approach to supporting students with disability and diverse learning needs to access the approved curriculum. UDL focusses on eliminating barriers through initial designs that consider the needs of diverse people, rather than overcoming barriers later through individual adaptation (Rose et al., 2006; Doabler et al., 2015; Novak & Thibodeau, 2016).

The UDL framework is underpinned by three principles which provide educators with guidelines for designing and implementing instruction in a flexible manner that meets the needs of diverse learners (Rose et al., 2005), whilst improving the learning process for all students (He, 2014; Katz & Sokal, 2016; Navarro et al., 2016). As a framework, UDL is a way of thinking about the planning, teaching, and assessment cycle, not a list of pedagogical strategies. The philosophy of UDL is based on 3 broad principles, underpinned by 9 guidelines and 31 checkpoints, which are divided into three layers: access, build, and internalise.

3 Layers of support

The first layer, access, is designed to support educators to consider ways of providing students with access to the learning process. The second layer, build, provides educators with approaches for building on their students' access to the learning process. The final layer, internalise, aims to provide educators with ideas for supporting learners to develop internal strategies to independently overcome their barriers to the learning process.

Principle 1: Engagement

The first principle of UDL, referred to as Engagement, is the idea that during the planning, teaching, and assessment cycle educators ask themselves, "am I engaging my students in the learning process in multiple ways?" The first principle underlying the UDL framework is the belief that there are multiple ways of engaging students. By recognising that no single option works for all students, teachers provide students with a range of engaging learning materials.

The first principle of UDL is underpinned by three guidelines recruiting interest (guideline seven), sustaining effort and persistence (guideline eight), and self-regulation (guideline nine). These guidelines are underpinned by 10 checkpoints. Guidelines and checkpoints are more targeted and specific ways of implementing a broad principle of the UDL framework.

Principle 2: Representation

The goal for any educator is to create lessons or materials that provide access for the most students and making classrooms accessible for all learners. The second principle (Representation) is the belief that there are multiple ways of representing knowledge during the learning process. The second principle is underpinned by three guidelines perception (guideline one), language and symbols (guideline two), and comprehension (guideline three).

The goal of principle two is for students to comprehend information. To achieve this, they first need to be able to physically access information and understand the language and symbols used within the information. These guidelines are underpinned by 12 checkpoints.

Another way the UDL framework advocates teachers can reduce barriers for all learners is by providing students with multiple ways of demonstrating their knowledge and understanding. The third and final principle (Action & Expression) is the belief that students can demonstrate their action and expression in multiple ways. Underpinning this idea is that the learning goal(s) taken from the approved curriculum are separated from a specific means of demonstrating them unless explicitly named within the curriculum. Students need to be allowed to physically demonstrate their learning before they can demonstrate it through expression and communication. Once students can demonstrate their learning in these two ways, they need to be supported to develop executive functioning in relation to their knowledge and skills.

Principle 3: Action and expression

Principle 3 of UDL is underpinned by the process of teachers constantly collecting evidence of learning against the learning goal(s). A UDL approach to assessment incorporates recurring and flexible formative assessment throughout instruction to provide ongoing, actionable feedback to educators and students before failure takes place, when acting can make a real difference for all (Rose et al., 2018).

Resources

For more information about Universal Diverse for Learning www.cast.org/impact/universal-design-for-learning-udl