

CONNECTED EDUCATION
EVERY LEADER, EVERY
TEACHER, EVERY LEARNER

BRIDGE



LEARNING INNOVATORS IN EDUCATION

UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

The following resource is derived from a presentation by James Malope to the participants of the 2018 GTI Axis Summit. Here you will find a brief discussion on the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as well as tips on how to increase collaboration in the classroom, plan an inclusive classroom environment and how to make the shift from traditional teaching (which is teaching centred) to a learner centred approach.

1. Universal Design for Learning

Some classrooms still follow traditional “class rules”. For example; learners must face forward, no noise, no helping each other, no looking around and desks are strictly in a row. However, traditional learning is not working. We are not allowing children to participate with the curriculum and this is why they are uninterested.

Teachers see children as empty vessels that need to be overloaded with information. From this perspective, teachers think they need to teach all they know as if teachers are Gods of some sort, but we must realise children know more than we think they do. The role of the teacher needs to change from being the star in the front of the class to - a facilitator of learning.

Accessible instruction is most often referred to as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), based on the principles of universal design pioneered by architect Ronald Mace. Mace advocated for the design of buildings to be as accessible to as many people as possible. These principles expanded beyond the built environment to design in other fields such as education.

In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a push to provide learners with disabilities with access to education. Much research and work was completed to adapt the learner to the learning environment by providing accommodations for the learner after the learning process was set.

Researchers determined that when principles of universal design were applied to the learning environment, it improved opportunities for learning for all learners. When UDL principles are incorporated into the curriculum during its design and development, they lay the foundation with learning outcomes, activities, assessments, and teaching methods that improve accessibility for all learners (Rose & Meyer, 2002).

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an educational framework based on research in the learning sciences, including cognitive neuroscience, which guides the development of flexible learning environments that can accommodate individual learning differences.

2. Benefits of using UDL principles

- Creates a more learner-centred environment which enables learners to make choices and be more engaged in the learning process.
- Provides inclusion by providing multiple ways to access content and express learning. This learner diversity is needed as learners learn in different ways.
- Eliminates barriers to learning- this includes the physical, social and environmental factors.
- The curriculum is understood by all learners.

3. The three principles of UDL

3.1 Multiple means of representation

- Perception
- Language, expressions and symbols
- Comprehension

Learners are different in the ways that they take in and understand information which is presented to them. Some learners naturally grasp information a lot faster than other learners, while some learners grasp information faster if it is visually represented. Therefore, providing multiple means of representation is essential as it allows for more connections to be made between the different learning mediums.

3.2 Multiple means of action and expression

- Physical action
- Expression and communication
- Executive function

Learners differ in the way that they handle a learning environment and express what they have learnt. Some learners may be able to express themselves better physically while others with physical barriers may struggle with expressing themselves in this manner. There is not one means of expression that will be ideal for all learners, so providing options for this is vitally important.

3.3 Multiple means of engagement

- Recruiting interest
- Sustaining effort and persistence
- Self -regulation

Learners differ in the ways in which they are motivated to learn and there are many factors that can influence this such as neurology, culture, personal relevance, subjectivity and background knowledge. Some learners are highly engaged by novelty while others disengage as they prefer a strict routine. Some learners may like to work on their own while others may prefer to work in groups and these differences need to be taken into account.

