

Embedding the principles of Universal Design for Learning into lesson plan development:

The learners, their environment, and the instructional goal.

Lorrie Garcia

University of Texas at Brownsville

## **Overview**

Each season a new initiative in education is touted as being The Solution for k-12 learners. The common goal for each of these is simply good teaching practices. Attending to individual student learning needs is essential to garnering a mastery of curricular objectives and utilizing a Universal Design for Learning in lesson plan development fills does exactly that. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) abides by three guiding principles: Offering multiple means of engaging students, offering multiple methods for the students to acquire the information, and allowing multiple choices for expressing what they have learned.

## **Background**

Despite vast research in education, the implementation of research-based practices is not being widely implemented in classrooms. The broad assumption is that apathetic teachers are unwilling to waver from their established teaching methods. However, the reality of embedding a new technique in the classroom can be daunting; especially when that may clash with an educator's natural teaching style. UDL allows teachers to embrace their natural teaching style, while focusing on embedding supports for an array of student needs from the onset. The guiding principles of UDL honor both those initiatives in education and good teaching practices we all strive to embrace, while offering practical suggestions about helping overcome student barriers in accessing the curriculum. UDL, a process based on brain research, has bloomed from a need for students with disabilities to access the general education curriculum into an understanding that certain supports, such as closed caption videos, are essential for some students yet beneficial for all. The academic community is currently noticing the benefits of a universally designed

lesson for students with different learning requirements; just as decades ago architects began understanding the benefits of universally designed structures for people with different physical requirements. Since 1984, the premier research and development organization in the ideology of UDL, the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST), has focused their resources and efforts on disseminating the value of lessons with UDL principles in place for all students (<http://www.cast.org/about/index.html>). Unfortunately, the actual application of UDL when designing instruction remains bewildering to for some educators. Fortunately, administrative teams across the country, such as the Curriculum and Instruction department at Northeast Independent School District (NEISD) in San Antonio, Texas, have distinguished UDL as a priority initiative and are fully supporting a diffusion of the information with resources and funding.

### **The Learning Environment**

This instructional unit will be constructed as a professional development for faculty of NEISD. A thirty minute afterschool session will be offered via A-Train, the district online scheduling tool for all professional development. Teachers will meet in the fifth floor conference room of the Richard A. Middleton Education Center. This room has a Smart Board, overhead projector with computer connectors, and parallelogram-shaped tables for supporting a universally designed space. It is essential that the lesson presented on UDL also be a UDL-ized lesson in itself.

### **The Performance Environment**

Lesson development can occur either independently or in teams. Ideally, the teachers will build campus capacity by working with their department in creating UDL lesson plans as a team and

having conversations about available supports in our district. This will proceed on their individual campuses during their team meeting time.

### **The Intended Audience**

Target learners for the purpose of this instructional unit are certified k-12 special education teachers in Lab and co-teach settings, and certified general education English teachers employed by NEISD. As faculty of this school district, they are required to pass minimum technology proficiency standards; therefore the target audience is educated and has a general understanding of 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge. The majority of the learners will be middle-aged females with a Bachelor's degree in education and two or more Texas teaching certifications.

### **Overarching Instructional Goal**

All faculty in attendance at the UDL Workshop will know three methods of integrating UDL into their lesson plan development.

### **Specific Goal**

After completing this UDL Workshop, teachers will be able to name and fully understand at least one method for each of the three guiding principles of UDL. They will also understand the importance of building UDL supports into a lesson from the onset, rather than retrofitting lessons as student needs arise.

### **Explanation of Specific Goal to Selected Members of Target Audience**

The specific goal of the instructional unit was presented to four target audience members on 22 September 2012 at a district Super Saturday session. Each expressed interest in the short lesson

giving an overview of UDL and having the opportunity to take three simple ways to embed UDL into their lesson plans.

**Summary**

This training is not a requirement. Since the learners will be attending without administrative directive, they will have intrinsic motivation and a genuine desire to understand UDL. To honor the time of the learners, this professional development will consist of a succinct chunk of information with supporting documents to lead them to additional resources, and follow-up support available by the assistive technology specialist upon request.

## References

(2012). About Cast. Retrieved from <http://www.cast.org/about/index.html>

(2012). About UDL. Retrieved from <http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl>