MAXIMIZING LEARNING FOR ALL STUDENTS

INCLUSION PRACTICES FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND PARISH RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

UNIVERSAL DESIGN
for Learning

You may not know the term "universal design" but you and I encounter it often in our everyday lives as we access information and navigate our community. Universal Design or UD is the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for added on adaptation or specialized design. This concept of universal design is clearly seen in architecture, where considerations of physical access for individuals with disabilities are incorporated into the original design rather than added later. This approach has been life changing for people with disabilities and at the same time has had tremendous benefit for the broader population. Examples of universal design are closed captions, automatic doors and accessibility features on smartphones. These design elements help people with disabilities as well as the general population in a variety of ways. For example, the closed-caption option on TVs and YouTube videos allow people with hearing loss to see text of what is being said onscreen. Closed captioning (CC) benefits everyone. You only need to go into a gym or noisy restaurant to witness the benefits of using the captioning.

The idea of UD has been adapted for learning environments. The term Universal Design for Learning (UDL) was coined by CAST (Center for Applied Special Technology) in 1999. To understand what UDL is, it helps to understand what it's *not*. The word "universal" may throw you off. It may sound as though UDL is about finding one way to teach all kids. But UDL actually takes the opposite approach.

The goal of UDL is to use a variety of teaching methods to remove any barriers to learning and give all students equal opportunities to succeed. UDL doesn't specifically target students with learning and attention issues or other disabilities. It's about building in flexibility that can be adjusted for *every* student's strengths and needs and thus the most vulnerable learner as well as the most gifted have equal access and opportunities to succeed.

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UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING
Framework and Application

UDL is a natural extension of the current work in neuroscience that says each brain processes information differently. CAST's research identified three primary networks that impact learning. The **recognition network** deals with incoming stimuli and affects "what" students learn. The **strategic network** mediates how students process incoming information based on such things as past experience or background knowledge. The **affective network** regulates students' attitudes and feelings about incoming information as well as their motivation to engage in specific activities. Successful teaching and learning involves addressing all three networks simultaneously.

Based on these three networks, CAST cites three principles of UDL:

• **Multiple means of representation** - to give learners various ways of acquiring information and knowledge. Is the information presented only orally/auditoraly? Or are other means used? Examples could be: video captioning and video description, highlighted vocabulary in subject matter content; main ideas offered through graphic organizers; vocal directions matched with printed and visual/image representations (e.g., pictured directions in learning centers); pre-teaching opportunities for new vocabulary and concepts; color shading used for emphasis; use of Visuwords

or other supports for vocabulary development; and visual cueing for feedback during class.

• **Multiple means of expression** - to provide learners alternatives for demonstrating what they know. Will they expess what they know orally, through pictures, demonstrate it through a project, video or in writing?

• **Multiple means of engagement**—to tap into learners' interests, offer appropriate challenges, and increase motivation. Will there be group activities, a means of an interactive response using technology, hands on manipulatives, a tactile response or other ways for immidiate and sustained engagement?

UDL benefits all students by:

- Meeting the needs of the widest range of students by reducing the number of barriers to learning
- Providing challenging, salient, and meaningful materials to students with a range of abilities
- Allowing students to learn in accordance with their dominant learning preferences
- Creating alternative ways for students to both receive and deliver information

The good news is that UDL is not in conflict with other methods and practices. It actually incorporates and supports many current research-based approaches to teaching and learning that we have been using for years, such as the following:

- Cooperative learning (group work)
- Differentiated instruction
- Performance-based assessment
- Project-based learning
- Multisensory teaching
- Theory of multiple intelligence
- Principles of student-centered learning

Preparing a lesson with Universal Design for Learning in mind will provide more ways for students to access the information and learning; facilitate more ways for students to actively participate and engage and encourages more ways for students to demonstrate learning. This results in more equitable access to success and accomplishment for ALL learners. As one proponent of UDL says: "UDL offers a new way of thinking about creating multiple learning opportunities in every area of course design and lesson preparation. Once you start thinking this way, the sky's the limit!"

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A new edition to the ABC Notes, **Maximizing Learning for All Students** will explore inclusion practices and evidenced based strategies that minimizes barriers and maximizes learning for ALL students.