

Universal Design for Learning and its benefits for students with Learning Disabilities

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ABSTRACT : The roots of UDL are found in early civil rights and special education legislation that emphasized the right of all students to a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (Hitchcock, Meyer, Rose, & Jackson, 2005). The UDL framework was conceived by researchers at the Center for Applied Special Technologies (CAST) in the late 1980s as the result of the alignment of three conceptual shifts: advancements in architectural design, developments in education technology, and discoveries from brain research. Paradigm Shift with emphasis on Power, inequality, and social change is required to perceive disability. Universal design for learning (UDL) is developed to promote cognitive access to education. Paper will deal with the benefits related to the Practices or full participation in the academic or social life of the classroom among Children with learning disabilities. Adopted by education, Universal Design for learning, extends to the development of curriculum and instruction. Universal Design for learning is a "blueprint for creating flexible goals, methods, materials and assessment that work for everyone (CAST, 1998, paragraph 2) Universal design for learning: A guide for teachers & educational professionals, suggested following applications based on principals of UDL. Appropriate environment for learning classroom environment and the curricular materials allows for variations in physical and cognitive access by students as well as for variations in institutional methods; classroom environment allows for varied student grouping; classroom space encourages learning (mason, orkwis & scott, 2005, in instructional theories supporting universal design for learning teaching to individual learners).

Keywords: Universal Design for Learning, Learning disability, Paradigm Shift

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally it has been suggested that disabilities in general and learning disabilities are some kinds of disease, could be diagnosed medically, even for educational purposes. It was believed that they could be given educational treatment either in segregated special schools or special settings in general schools. However, the research and experiences have shown that they could learn like any other children in mainstream schools provided the education is good, which means the pedagogy is involving or participating, and the curriculum is appropriate to the child to meet the larger educational goals as also his or her individual needs.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an educational framework based on research in the learning sciences, including cognitive neuroscience, that guides the development of flexible learning environments and learning spaces that can accommodate individual learning differences. Universal Design for learning is a set of principles that provide teachers with a structure to develop instructions to meet the diverse needs of all learners. The UDL framework, first defined by David H. Rose, Ed.D. of the Harvard Graduate School of Education and the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) in the 1990s, calls for creating curriculum from the outset that provides: Multiple means of representation to give learners various ways of acquiring information and knowledge, Multiple means of expression to provide learners alternatives for demonstrating what they know, and Multiple means of engagement to tap into learners' interests, challenge them appropriately, and motivate them to learn.

Learning Disability (LD)

Learning Disability, is a term that denotes a group of disorders manifest as difficulties in the acquisition and use of abilities such as listening, reading, writing, reasoning, spelling, arithmetic or of social skills (Gerber and Reiff 1994)

Resources that are used in the UDL

Resources in Universal Design for learning includes

1. Academic resources, like lesson plan, instructional methods, assessment methods,
2. Formulating Objectives,
3. Determining teaching strategies and learning situations,
4. Selection of pedagogical materials,
5. Use of technological tools,
6. Variety of products resulting from learning situations,
7. Evaluation.

Importance of using these resources are, UDL addresses the diversity rampant in the classroom, it provides opportunity to all students to be engaged in various relevant activities according to their interest, it provides more choices to students, it Scaffolds learning, it fosters collaboration.

Importance of UDL

UDL is important for students as well by providing, access to the information, and be able to turn it into usable Knowledge, getting different support, negotiating different challenges, through the better individual support, building literacy, kids always finding and creating the knowledge they need, kids are able to find their passion and purpose.

Ideal classroom with UDL

Classroom with UDL will Provide learners with as much discretion and autonomy as possible by providing choices in such things as:

1. The level of perceived challenge,
2. The type of rewards or recognition available,
3. The context or content used for practicing and assessing skills,
4. The tools used for information gathering or production,
5. The color, design, or graphics of layouts,
6. The sequence or timing for completion of subcomponents of tasks,
7. Allow learners to participate in the design of classroom activities and academic tasks,
8. Involve learners, where and whenever possible, in setting their own personal academic and behavioral goals.

Ideal classroom with UDL

UDL classroom will be including

1. Optimize relevance, value, and authenticity-
Where individuals are engaged by information and activities that are relevant and valuable to their interests and goals. This does not necessarily mean that the situation has to be equivalent to real life, as fiction can be just as engaging to learners as non-fiction, but it does have to be relevant and authentic to learners' individual goals and the instructional goals. Individuals are rarely interested in information and activities that have no relevance or value. In an educational setting, one of the most important ways that teachers recruit interest is to highlight the utility and relevance, of learning and to demonstrate that relevance through authentic, meaningful activities. It is a mistake, of course, to assume that all learners will find the same activities or information equally relevant or valuable to their goals. To recruit all learners equally, it is critical to provide options that optimize what is relevant, valuable, and meaningful to the learner.
2. Minimize threats and distractions-
One of the most important things a teacher can do is to create a safe space for learners. To do this, teachers need to reduce potential threats and distractions in the learning environment. When learners have to focus their attention on having basic needs met or avoiding a negative experience, they cannot concentrate on the learning process. While the physical safety of a learning environment is of course necessary, subtler types of threats and distractions must be attended to as well; what is threatening or potentially distracting depends on learners' individual needs and background. An English Language Learner might find language experimentation threatening, while some learners might find too much sensory stimulation distracting. The optimal instructional environment offers options that reduce threats and negative distractions for everyone to create a safe space in which learning can occur.

The UDL Guidelines

Guidelines given are a tool used in the implementation of Universal Design for Learning. These guidelines offer a set of concrete suggestions that can be applied to any discipline or domain to ensure that all learners can access and participate in meaningful, challenging learning opportunities. Alongside various fruitful latest trends are working together in the field of special education, like technological advancements through ICT, policy perspective in India and Abroad, and zero rejection policy. Some questions are always there in the mind of teachers, students, and parents that what is the future perspective of those who are labelled under a certain type of benchmark disabilities. No doubt that the recently applicable emerging trends are helpful namely team teaching, alternative teaching, parallel teaching, station-teaching, one teach one assist, co-teaching methods, peer assisted learning strategy, and class-wide peer tutoring. UDL, is helpful for diverse learners, the more meaning is added to the special education through universal design for learning. Universal design for learning (UDL) is a recent paradigm that uses technology integrated into curriculum in a proactive fashion (Rose, Meyer, Rappolt & Strangeman, 2001).

Even knowingly that the 15% of the world's population, experience some form of disability. It is usually difficult to find out the reason for the neurological disabilities, including learning disability. Once the child begins with formal schooling and participating in the teaching-learning process along with other co-curricular activities, these learning disabilities actually being recognized. Learning Disability is not a recently used term, it was coined in 1963 by Samuel Kirk, while addressing a group of parents at the conference, referring majorly to those parents who were hyperactive and who had reading difficulties or disorders of language.

The educational need and requirements of the student with learning disability, can be better catered once the basic nature and characteristics dysfunction of learning disability are clear to teachers, parents, and other programme facilitator. Some thing needed to be taken care of in the very initial stages of developmental periods are about the visual spatial orientation, visual spatial dysfunction, temporal sequential organization and memory, dysfunction, auditory processing, auditory dysfunction, and expressive language. With these type of issues in mild to profound categories, makes the huge impact in the life of children with learning disabilities.

Remedial programme if well organised, based on the student's level in the areas like attention, auditory and visual memory, fine motor skills, oral language, number skills, cognition, reading, writing, comprehension, and spelling will numerous be helpful. These programmes are systematic, authentic, and substantial in helping out the student with learning disabilities and there major focus is on improving the performance of the students within a limited time period. Remediation in different areas are done through different strategies including the activities which are useful for the students with learning disabilities. Remedial programme become more important as this started once the identification and assessment process has been taken up with in the mentioned criteria.

Latest trends, updates, regulations in UDL

1. Section 508, added in 1998 to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, mandates digital accessibility, that is, federal agencies, contractors, and fund recipients must make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities.
2. The UDL framework is used to address the diversity of student learning needs. In one example, the framework of UDL is applied in preparing speech language pathology graduate students through their course in Augmentative and Alternative Communication

(AAC). This blended learning experience, inspired by UDL principles, is hosted through the open-source Sakai learning management system (University of Rhode Island, United States).

3. At National University (NU), educator training programmes are primarily or partially online and must integrate California Standards for the Teaching Profession and Teaching Performance Expectations (TPEs). Recently revised TPEs reference and address the concepts of UDL. National University's Teacher Education (TED) and Special Education (SPED) programmes are working together to include these UDL concepts in their curricula (National University, United States).

4. Universal design for learning is a curriculum and instructional design framework based in neuroscientific research and focused on how the brain recognises, processes, organises, evaluates, and responds to varied types of information (Meyer, Rose & Gordon 2014). Its three core principles, specifically multiple means of representation, multiple means of action and expression and multiple means of engagement, are enhanced and clarified by the UDL guidelines (Hall, Strangman & Meyer 2003). While UDL was first developed primarily to address instructional design in K–12 education, most recently CAST and the UDL Implementation and Research Network have focused on the challenges of equity and inclusion at higher education levels.

5. The recent legislative development in the judiciary system of Indian Government the Right of persons with Disabilities (2016) is emphasized on “Universal Design” to meet the needs of the persons with disabilities in all walks of life.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper was on reviewing the importance of UDL and

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) provides the opportunity for all students to access, participate in, and progress in the general-education curriculum by reducing barriers to instruction. Advantage of UDL is that both in-service and pre-service teachers can readily share the language of UDL about the curriculum for learners. By paring down teaching and learning to the three processes of flexible methods of presentation, expression and engagement, all those working with the learner can collaborate with a common understanding.

Reference

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