

chapter 10

Disability Studies in Inclusive Education

Overview: Universal Design for Learning

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Section learning outcomes

After completing this section, you will be able to:

- ✓ Understand the concept of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in relation to Universal Design.
- ✓ Describe the principles of UDL in terms of representation, engagement and expression.
- ✓ Explore the guidelines for UDL and how they can inform decisions on how to vary curriculum and instruction for differing learners.
- ✓ Understand the organisation and structure of UDL guidelines and checkpoints, and how these can help all students to become expert learners in their own right.
- ✓ Explore how UDL can meet a wide range of learning needs in different contexts in the Global South.
- ✓ Explain how UDL can combine with reasonable accommodation (adjustments made in access/format/content for persons with disabilities) to provide targeted support for children with severe disabilities.

Introduction

In this section, we have the opportunity to explore in greater depth how UDL is an approach that makes learning environments accessible to all students and allows them to participate and succeed. We consider how UDL can benefit not only children with disabilities but also many other children with diverse needs.

Insider view: Perspectives on education

Hello. My name is Dr Elizabeth Dalton and I have been involved in the fields of education and special education since 1975, when I began working at a state-run residential institution for persons with developmental disabilities (known as “mental retardation” at that time) following my graduation from the University of Rhode Island with a B.A. in Psychology.



I actually worked in recreation, teaching the residents of this institution how to swim, or at least how to relax and enjoy being in the water. In that year, I learned much about myself and discovered what would be my lifelong professional calling – working with individuals who have widely varying learning needs and/or disabilities.

I went back to school, earned my special education certification and began teaching. After that, I took a position working with students with disabilities at a community college and later moved into university work – mainly focusing on teacher preparation and working directly with student teachers. Along the way, my interest developed around technology and how it could be used to expand access to learning for my students. Soon, I became aware of this new concept in education, Universal Design for Learning. I spent a year studying and researching with the people who developed the UDL concept, framework and guidelines. Now, as a consultant, UDL is an integral part of my life as an educator, a developer and a learner. Since 2005, I have worked with UDL, using the framework to guide a wide variety of professional development activities.

Early on, I helped to assemble teams of classroom teachers, university educators, and representatives of the Rhode Island Department of Education to learn the basic tenets of UDL and apply them to the process of lesson and unit planning, expanding access for students with differing learning needs. This led to the development of the Rhode Island Modified UDL Educator Checklist in 2009, a practical tool for teachers to use in implementing UDL in their planning and instruction. I have shared this checklist during the many UDL educator trainings I have carried out since, both in-person and online, at conferences and professional development workshops around the world. Always, I work to integrate the principles of UDL in my presentations to vary representation, expression and engagement with the materials, modeling UDL for the students. When teachers can experience UDL in this way, it brings home to them the possibilities that UDL offers in their own instruction to address varied learning needs. Over the years, I have worked with educators in South Africa, Australia, Kuwait, Brunei, and most recently India. Each of the participants was able to find their own path for thinking about the relevance of UDL and applying it in their own contexts to expand the scope of their instructional design, including a broader range of learners.

Each of you have a unique path that has brought you here to take this course, and each of you have important experiences that you bring to own learning and to the learning of others around you. All experiences are important – for you, your colleagues and your students – and these experiences have helped to shape who you are now, who you will become, and how you will use what you learn throughout this course. Let me share with you now a few brief ideas about UDL before you enter into the experiences of the next two chapters.



UDL is a relatively new term to the field of education, but it certainly is related to ideas that have existed in education for a long time. For example, the Visual-Auditory-Tactile-Kinesthetic (or VAKT) method of multisensory instruction dates back to the early work of Grace Fernald, who established the first known clinic for remedial instruction in 1921, in Los Angeles, California, USA. Fernald's work was followed by Samuel Orton and Anna Gillingham at Columbia University in New York City, who were studying children with language-processing difficulties (such as dyslexia) and applied the basic concepts of Fernald's multisensory instruction method in the area of remedial reading, eventually developing the world-famous Orton-Gillingham multisensory technique for teaching reading. This is just one example of possible ideas in education that you are already aware of and can apply to connect with your developing understanding of UDL and how it can be used to expand access for your learners through the intentional design of variation into the materials, methods and assessments you may use now, or in the future as a teacher.

Our further UDL work together is organised into two chapters: **Chapter 11** on UDL basics and **Chapter 12** on moving UDL into practice. Both chapters contain readings, reflections and activities, as well as some helpful videos to learn from. Our learning goals are ambitious, but I hope that by the end of this section, you will feel empowered to move forward and start trying some of the UDL concepts and strategies in your own educational settings. Thank you for your interest in expanding your knowledge and understanding of UDL in support of building a more inclusive environment for ALL in your classroom, or wherever you are teaching.

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