



## Universal Design for Learning

### What was, What is, and What Can Be and A Case Study

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PDF of presentation available for download  
at <http://www.joyzabala.com>

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## Evolution of Access



- Access to schools
- Access to classrooms
- Access to general education curriculum
- Access to instructional materials



## A Transformative Tool



## The Starting Point - 1985

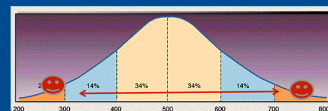


CAST began by addressing the needs of students  
“in the margins”, primarily with technology-based  
accommodations



## From the Margins to the Whole

- From the context of creating responsive  
learning environments for students with  
disabilities
- To the focus on enhance learning  
opportunities for all students



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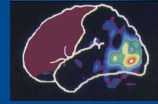


## Roots in Architecture

A Universal Design approach is simply more practical, elegant and effective, since it is always better to build in flexibility from the beginning, rather than try to add it on later.

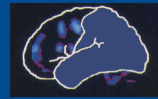


## Roots in Neuroscience



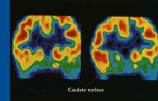
### Recognition

*Multiple representations of information*



### Strategic

*Multiple options for expression*



### Affective

*Multiple means of engagement*



## UDL as a Technology Initiative

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) was viewed as a technology initiative based on the process of building in accessibility and achievement supports that address the diverse learning needs of all students



## Three Principles

Universal Design for Learning calls for ...

- **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
- **Multiple means of engagement**, to tap into learners' interests, offer appropriate challenges, and increase motivation.



## Universal Design for Learning

What is...



## A Pivotal Point



### Evolution of Achievement

- IDEA 1997 Progress in the general education curriculum
- Inclusion of ALL students in the Accountability System

## UDL UDL as a Curricular Initiative

Recognizes and attempts to eliminate the disabling features in Curricula:

- WHO they can teach
- WHAT they can teach
- HOW they can teach
- Preparing students for their future

## UDL Universal



## UDL Design



## UDL Learning



Models and Mentors  
Graduated Scaffolding  
Progress monitoring



## UDL

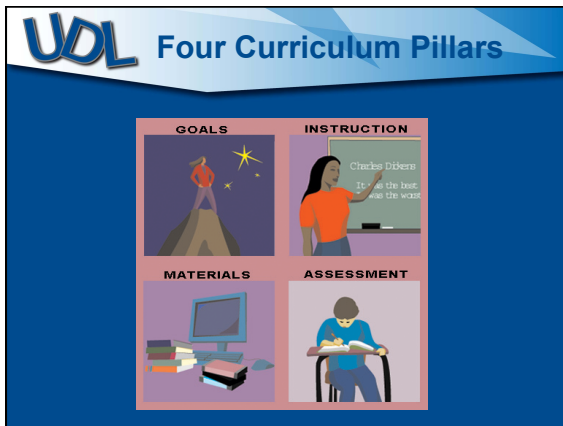
*"UDL seeks to decreasing unacceptable challenge while maintaining acceptable challenge"*

CAST believes that "barriers to learning are not, in fact, inherent in the capacities of learners, but instead arise in learners' interactions with inflexible educational goals, materials, methods, and assessments."

Teaching Every Student in the Digital Age, p. vi

## UDL Universal Design for Learning

- ✓ Reduces barriers in instruction
- ✓ Provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges
- ✓ Maintains high achievement expectations for all students



## UDL Goals

*Firm Goals, Flexible Means*

- Clearly identified
- Separate from means

## UDL Assessment

- Progress Monitoring
- Authentic Assessment
- Accessibility
- Construct validity

## UDL Methods

- Models and Mentors
- Graduated Scaffolding

## UDL Materials

Emphasis on  
Flexible, Transformable Digital Media

BUT... digital media does not equal UDL

## UDL The UDL Elevator Speech

- Is a framework for ensuring access, participation and progress in the general education curriculum
- Assumes and plans for diverse student strengths and needs
- Places emphasis on using digital technology and other strategies and materials to support diverse learners
- Includes assistive technology for some
- Is not limited to high tech environments





## What can be...

*"Where there was once an observer,  
let there now be a participant."*

Jerome Bruner



## UDL in Action!

### Universal Design for Learning: Case Study of a District Implementation



## What is Universal Design for Learning?



## Mixed Messages from the Field

- Universal Design for Learning (UDL) provides a blueprint for creating flexible goals, methods, materials, and assessments that accommodate learner differences. (CAST)
- Universal is about optimal access for the widest range of students (Thompson, et al., 2002)



## Mixed Messages from the Field

- UDL is a *research-based model* for curricular design that ensures participation in the general educational program of all students, including those with disabilities (CAST, 2007)



## Mixed Messages from the Field

Universal design for learning means a *scientifically valid framework* for guiding educational practice that –

- (A) provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and in the ways students are engaged; and
- (B) reduces barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, and maintains high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient.



## Mixed Messages from the Field

- Technology is essential for implementing UDL (Edyburn, 2010).
- UDL is about the pedagogy, or instructional practices, used for students with and without disabilities (King-Sears, 2009).
- UDL is about reducing reliance on print based instructional materials (Pisha & Stahl, 2005).



## Mixed Messages from the Field

- Universal Design is just “good teaching” (Thomas Hehir, personal communication, 2009)



## Study Objectives:

- To provide a in-depth description of UDL in practice.
- To gain an understanding of UDL implementation at a district level.
- To explore the impact of UDL for students with special education needs and for all students.



## Case Study Analysis

- A systematic approach to understanding qualities, or the essential nature, of a phenomenon within a particular context. (Brantlinger et al., 2005)



## The Case

*“Greater St. Albert Catholic schools is a welcoming Christ-centered learning community that awakens the hearts and minds of students to God while educating and nurturing each to work, live fully, and serve others”*



## The Case

- St. Albert, Morinville and Legal all located north of Edmonton, as well as portions of the rural areas surrounding these communities
- Formed January 1, 1995 third largest Catholic school jurisdiction in Alberta



## Why GSACRD?

- I have a long standing relationship with the district
- I am familiar with their work towards implementation of UDL
- Proximity to Edmonton
- Nominated for their Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Initiative for the ASBA 2009 Premier's Award for School Board Innovation and Excellence



## Methodology

### Data Sources

- Learning Support Team (leadership)
- School Administration
- Learning Support Facilitators
- Selected Classroom Teachers



## Methodology

### Types of Data gathered

- Interviews / Web-based Surveys
- Focused conversations
- Document Reviews
- Selected Classroom Observations



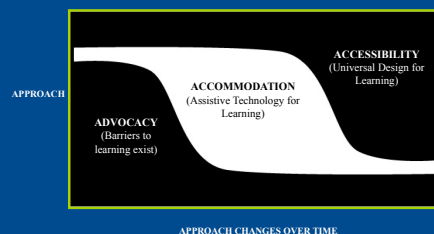
## Analysis

- Deductive - themes that are consistent with UDL as discussed in the literature
- Inductive - themes/issues that arise from the data but may or may not be present in current literature



## What I found...

### The A 3 Model in Action...



## Advocacy...

- District driven by social justice - "catholic means Universal"
- District with historical practice of inclusive education



## Advocacy...

- School district personnel felt that they had hit a wall in terms of inclusive practice.
- Looking for a new approach to support authentic inclusive education



## The Power of the Team

- A *team* comprises a group of people linked in a common purpose.
- Teams are especially appropriate for conducting tasks that are high in complexity and have many interdependent subtasks.

Wikipedia



## Marriage of AT & IT

Merger of Special Education and Technology Branches



## One Learning Support Team



## Enabling District Initiatives

- Merger of Spec. Ed, Instruction, Curriculum & Technology Teams
- Reducing policy barriers e.g. creative use of funds
- Centralized Decision Making
- Distributed Learning
- Values based approach



## Accommodation (Assistive Technologies)

- Beginning with needs of Individual Learners
- *Being attentive to the learning needs of each student then finding them the corrective assistance.*
  - *Understanding our learners to provide the right tool*



## Enabling Initiatives

- Scanning Resources (Novels & Books)
- Access to AE Digital Repository
- Training and PD around UDL
- Building District Data Base of AT
- Inclusive Education
- Classroom Support Facilitators



## Enabling Initiatives

- RWG District Licensing
- Assistive Technology support beyond RWG (e.g. CoWriter)
- Pervasive Interactive White Board
- Emerge One-to-One Project
- Wireless Learning Environments
- Supporting Student Owned Devices
- Pilots of Emerging Technologies (iTouch)



## Accommodation (Assistive Technologies)

- Primarily developed as response for students with disabilities (linked to AT)
- Teacher UDL practice may be more focused on use of technology than on programs of study



## Moving to Accessibility

- There are pockets throughout the district where UDL is operationalized, but not yet a pervasive practice
- One to One especially seen as promising UDL in Action



## Moving to Accessibility

- *I would say that total UDL implementation is only fully happening/possible in the 1:1 laptop classrooms as that is the only place where students have continuous access to the tech.*
- *Thus, despite an understanding of UDL theory teachers would not be able to implement it beyond the ATL level.*

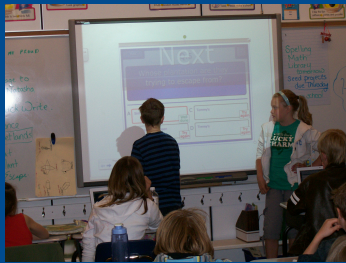


## Accessibility (UDL)





## Accessibility (UDL)



## Accessibility (UDL)



## Emerging Themes

- Technology is Necessary but Not Sufficient
- Digital Media is Critical
- Differences must be Ordinary



## *I don't want it if it's different*



## Emerging Themes

- Assessment, especially provincial assessment practices are seen as a deterrent to infusing UDL practices in the classroom
- Positive outcomes are assumed based on perceived student engagement & perceived student success



- *Difficult... how do we transfer that to assessment*
- *Hope it will transfer to our more traditional assessments*
- *Would love to have a rubric... but that is just not where I am ... TIME*



## UDL

- *Confidence and willingness to try tasks that once seemed impossible*
- *Greater overall engagement*
- *Less behavior issues*

## UDL

- *Students are happier to be included, more successful, more independent*
- *I believe it has allowed students to learn outcomes not available to them before.*

## UDL

### UDL in GSACRD is...

- Primarily a technology initiative
- An extension of Differentiated Instruction
- Established in pockets, primarily early grades and one-to-one classes
- Emerging in other places

## UDL

### UDL in GSACRD is...

- Becoming more proactive (more accessibility less need for accommodation)
- Best understood at district level - closer to classroom, less well understood

## UDL

### UDL in GSACRD is

- Linked to 21 Century learning
- A driver of change in the district
- A catalyst for staff enthusiasm and reinvigoration

## UDL

### UDL in GSACRD is challenged by:

- Traditional assessment practices
- Teaching resources (formats and accessibility)
- Teacher "KSAs"- mostly attitudes
- Access to technology
- Time



## UDL must make DI Doable...

- *Wish you could just make these lessons all the time... still up to you (teacher) to gather it together*
- *Collaboration helps but it is just not that easy...*



## The DI/UD Dance

Universal Design for Learning is  
PROACTIVE Design

Differentiated Instruction is  
RESPONSIVE Instruction

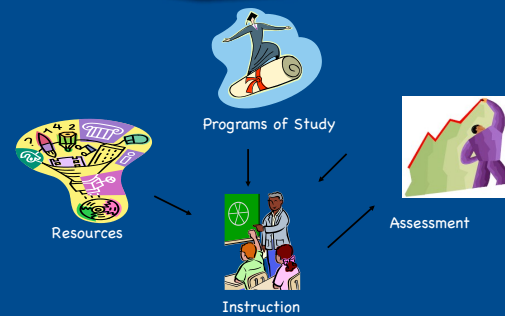


## District thoughts...

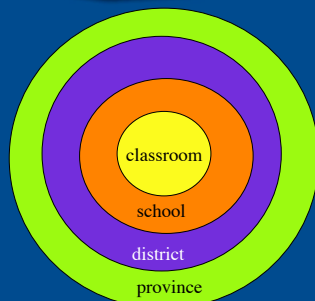
- *I DO think that where we are at in the division is to work further this year with teachers in terms of "Planning for diversity" at the OUTSET of the lesson plan process instead of planning for 1 student at a time.*
- *Now the focus needs to be on classrooms -to aid them in their problem-solving to reduce barriers to curricular access for kids.*



## The Curriculum



## Circles of Influence & Support



## Questions that remain...

- Documentation of benefit to students - with disabilities? Others?
- Links to programs of study - UDL in action was very activity based
- Systemic planning around UDL Framework... work in progress
- Clarity in terms of district plans and services.... Emerging

## UDL Future Considerations...

- IF we want to investigate UDL we have to understand what it IS and what it is NOT...
- What are critical features of UDL?
- Should UDL be considered as classroom practice or as instructional design?
- What needs to happen at the district, school and even provincial level?
- Does it “work” and for whom?

## UDL must be about outcomes!

In essence UDL outcome measurement must account for student performance in authentic 21st century learning environments...

## UDL must be about outcomes!

Evaluating at teacher's ability to implement UDL with a *certain level of fidelity* is critical to providing evidence that its design principles and model are entwined with performance outcomes.

Basham & Gardner (2010)

## UDL Stay tuned...



## UDL Selected References

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## Questions?



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