UDL: The Next Generation

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Abstract

For over 25 years Universal Design for Learning has been a movement in education. The first wave of designers and researchers worked to push UDL into the spotlight, but what's next? The second wave of UDL is working on in depth systemic change and tool development. Though they are not the "inventors" nor did they "discover" UDL and the theory and research behind it, they are its early adopters and researchers. This next generation of UDL is working to further the understanding of UDL, build tools for educators, incorporate UDL into district initiatives, and address current questions of practice.

Three practitioners reflect on their perspectives where the next generation of UDL is headed. Note the analogy they use that derives Star Trek Next Generation's Captain Jean Luc Picard's catch phrase "Make it so!"

Keywords
Implementation; Systemic Change, Application, Digital Learning Environments, Disruptive Education

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Digital Learning Environments

Introduction
Each year digital learning environments gain in enrollment due to a variety of reasons including both greater availability, and the need for individual students, particularly those with disabilities, to find success. Public schools are experimenting with digital learning for a variety of reasons. The demand by consumers, families and students, is one driver. Another is the economic impact that digital learning promises. Most districts within the United States are currently using some form of digital learning and every year there is a steady increase (Watson, Murin, Vashaw, Gemin, & Rapp, 2014).

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is poised to have a huge impact on the design of digital learning environments. The flexibility at the heart of UDL is a good fit with digital learning environments, a place where the variety of student learning styles can sometimes get overlooked. For example, if supports are included when designing a learning environment for readers with a learning disability or a visual impairment, then the disability is neutralized.

Current Practice
"I do not believe in online learning." This is a statement I hear a lot when presenting at conferences. It's bewildering, because digital learning environments currently range from full time virtual schools serving all grades, K through 12, to the post-secondary level. However since this generation of educators, researchers, educational theorists and thinkers, (or adults in general) are not experienced consumers of virtual or online learning, this sentiment is not really as shocking as it might seem.

Future thought – "Make It So"
Forward is only one way: There is a revolution happening, a disruption in schools led in large part by the presence of digital learning environments. How will teachers prepare for this change? How will they obtain the tools to design and create the robust learning experiences in an educational world that is virtual? Is viewing the digital learning environment through the lens and framework of UDL (also a disruptive presence) worth the effort, or is it the only way for the disruption to feed the need of learners?

BRYAN DEAN

Teacher Initiatives & Coaching

Introduction
The power of disruption contained within the theory of Universal Design for Learning is belied by its utilitarian title. The power of UDL derives from personal choice and tailored outcomes within purposely designed environments that promote freedom of output and connection to learning. UDL exists as a framework, not as a canned initiative; as a skeleton, not as a prescribed intervention. UDL is an iterative prototype of design with end-users driving future development. UDL possesses the power of reflective change in the very assumptions we make surrounding learning and its possibilities. This is why the concept cannot be summed up in the title.

Current Practice
UDL is meant to be ubiquitous, to exist within every system and mold itself to fit every facet of teaching practice. This is the mantra that drives my current work at the county level. Currently, I spend time developing tools for teachers, designing Professional Development (PD), connecting Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, Restorative practice/Social Justice, teacher evaluation models, and Social/Emotional Learning all to support UDL. More im-

portantly, I work to show the connections that exist intrinsically within these initiatives and how they complement one another. UDL is the system that unifies them and changes school structures both intellectually and physically.

I also work with other PD designers to embed UDL into their work, so as educators activate their learning networks and produce hierarchical differentiated outputs within their own practice, they experience the effects of UDL. This realization of "something different" leads to a deeper questioning of what UDL is. To provide a vehicle for this exploration, I have designed a reflective and ontological coaching model that explores the avenues of UDL implementation at the classroom, building, and district level while providing support systems along the way.

I have also worked with other instructional designers in our county to embed many of our created CCSS units for Math and ELA with UDL outcomes and products so teachers get a sense of applied UDL. In essence, we are attempting to build a movement; a movement of disruption and design, one with personal choice and UDL at its center.

Future Thought – Make It So

As the landscape of education transforms at an unprecedented pace and educators at every level try to manage the learning crisis that is developing, is it possible for UDL to become a stabilizing agent of change? Is UDL a universal enough framework to join together the different initiatives of reform? Most importantly, can UDL not only disrupt old modes of thinking, but be big enough to help build the next generation model? I believe there are enough of us who say "yes".

JON MUNDORF

District/Classroom Implementation

Introduction

The purpose of my dissertation study was to tell the story of my efforts to teach reading to a blind student in a universally designed general education classroom. Could the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework support the teaching of students with a variety of learning needs, including both low and high-incidence disabilities? By reflecting on my practice, collaborating with other educators throughout the study, and analyzing daily, the learning environment, I am a better teacher today than I was at the beginning of the study. The student's inclusion in my classroom enhanced my understanding of UDL which made me a more effective teacher for all of my students.

Current Practice

Universal Design for Learning is a broad topic still needing to be evaluated from different viewpoints and contexts. My dissertation study explored the topics of UDL and teaching reading to a student with blindness, but I could have just as easily studied how a student with fetal-alcohol syndrome, autism spectrum disorder, or giftedness impacted my UDL

teaching. Exploring the impact of different students on UDL implementation holds much promise for the further development of the framework, as well as the implementation of UDL on a large scale.

The UDL guidelines also provide a road map for students to be more metacognitive in their learning. What would happen if we put the UDL guidelines in the hands of students and asked them to create a portfolio of their own learning within the context of the UDL guidelines? In addition to content area academic standards, what if we also required students to develop their own personal learning portfolios! What would the impact be on student learning or socio-emotional development?

Throughout my dissertation study, students used tools to support their learning. My own expertise with assistive and instructional technologies proved to be an asset during this study. Educational technologies exist to support each of the UDL guidelines. We know that students vary in their learning needs and we have tools to address these needs, but do teachers, parents and students really understand how to use the tools?

Finally, UDL requires a conceptual shift. To implement UDL, we must place the onus of change on the designers of the learning environment and not on the individual student. I have yet to work with a teacher, parent, or principal who is not interested in UDL. Conceptually placing the focus of change on the learning environment makes sense to many, but once the idea has materialized in practice, it becomes difficult. What can we do within schools and professional development to aide in this implementation? What is already being done? Does this conceptual shift need to occur during teacher preparation programs?

Future Thought – Make It So

Recently, I read that UDL should be considered a framework in which evidence-based practices are embedded (Israel, Ribuffo, & Smith, 2014). This thought reminded me of a statement often used by CAST: UDL isn't a new initiative, it's the intersection of all other initiatives. As I consider these two thoughts, I can't help but think about the disruptive possibilities. Considering a new reading program? UDL will enhance it. Thinking about improving core instruction? Look no further than UDL. Instead of considering UDL as another thing do or implement, we can think of UDL as a way to make everything better.

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