UNIVERSAL DESIGN AS A TOOL TO PROMOTE INCLUSIVITY IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Universal Design is a concept from the field of architecture (TEAL 2017. The idea is that when buildings and their many components are well-designed, they are functional and accessible for people of all abilities. One of the most common examples of this concept are automatic doors. Doors that open automatically are designed to create an accessible entrance and exit for people with physical disabilities. However, everyone benefits from the convenience and ease of an automatic door, from people carrying their groceries in both hands to parents pushing strollers. In recent years, the field of education has borrowed this principle of universality and applied it to the classroom and learning. The idea and intent behind Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is to plan and use curricula that best serve all learners regardless of their abilities and backgrounds (TEAL 2017).

In this week's Teacher's Corner, teachers learn more about UDL and consider how its principles apply to the language-learning classroom. Be sure to return for next week's Teacher's Corner, when we follow up with a lesson plan and specific questions and adaptations necessary to implement UDL.

PRINCIPLES OF UDL

Many organizations and institutions have taken up the idea of using Universal Design in the education setting. These groups have provided foundational information for understanding the concept, and they share a number of principles for UDL and a variety of suggestions for implementing these principles. Using information from CAST, an educational research group, and the TEAL Center, a project of the U.S. Department of Education, we present a brief overview of the principles of UDL.

CAST (2018) summarizes the major principles of UDL, saying that educators should offer "multiple means for engagement, representation, and action and expression." (*Engagement* addresses the *why* of learning, *representation* addresses the *what* of learning, and *action and expression* addresses the *how* of learning). In this sense, consider the following questions:

- Can learners engage with the material or activity in different ways?

- How is the content presented to learners? Are there multiple representations of content and input?

- Can learners act on what they've learned or express their understanding of what they've learned in a variety of ways?

In short, UDL asks educators to diversify how material is presented, how activities are conducted, and how students demonstrate their understanding in order to accommodate and support all learners regardless of abilities (TEAL 2017).

In addition, for each of these principles above, teachers should consider how they will include the aspects *access*, *build*, and *internalize* (CAST 2018). For example, within the principle of *engagement*, we consider the aspect of *access*: how do students access engagement? They might access it, for example, through having a choice in how they will work through the material: either alone or in groups. The next section offers more specific suggestions using the framework presented here.

IMPLEMENTATION FOR THE LANGUAGE CLASS

Teachers wondering how to implement UDL should recognize that the principles outlined above are in line with best practices in teaching and learning. Language teachers are already trained to consider the

diversity among their learners and the many elements of English that will challenge a variety of learners. Here are some specific suggestions in terms of presentation and practice (TEAL 2017; CAST 2018).

Presentation

Presentation of language skills and content must come in multiple formats regardless of the target skill. For example, if a teacher plans to give a spoken summary of a reading text, best practices would recommend that the teacher also give students the summary in a written format. Here are a few more questions and suggestions regarding the presentation of material:

- *Can learners get their input from other means*? Can learners learn the material from other sources, such as distance learning, peers, or field experience?

- *Are there multiple formats for learners to interact with the content?* For example, do students have the opportunity to learn from a video, a podcast, or manipulatives?

- *Repeat, summarize, and check understanding.* For example, present the material using a summary and then review the presented material with a list.

- *Highlight patterns, clarify information, and offer opportunities for inquiry.*

- *Has background knowledge and learner motivation been activated?* For example, how can teachers use learners' background knowledge to prepare and excite them about the activity?

In essence, teachers present content in multiple ways so that all learners have the best chance possible to understand the material. Success in understanding will then help students when practicing the material and lead to successful learning.

Practice

As with presentation, students need a variety of ways to engage and practice the target language skill. Learners must be able to show what they can do with the language in a way that best supports their abilities.

- *How does the lesson incorporate opportunities for hands-on learning, role-plays, music, etc.?*

- *Can learners show their work and learning through multiple ways?* For example, for those that excel at speaking, can they do a short presentation to a group while other learners show their understanding through a graphic organizer?

- *How are language learning and learning strategies encouraged and developed?*

- *What opportunities are developed to encourage authentic practice and use of language?*

Ultimately, consider the vast array of best practices in language learning and expand those further to incorporate the principles of UDL. These principles complement and add to language learning practices while supporting all learners in the language classroom.

References

CAST. *The UDL Guidelines.* Accessed August 31, 2018, http://udlguidelines.cast.org/ .

TEAL Center. "TEAL Center. Fact Sheet No. 2: Fact Sheet: Universal Design for Learning." LINCS. Last modified July 6, 2017, accessed October 15, 2018, https://lincs.ed.gov/state-resources/federal-initiatives/teal/guide/udl .