

Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework that guides the design of learning experiences to proactively meet the needs of all students. Utilizing UDL principles provides learning environments where learning barriers are removed, and all students are provided with equitable opportunities for learning. These principles support the accommodation processes for special population students. The principles of UDL are integrated through three components: multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation, and multiple means of student action and expression. By applying these principles, teachers can promote and facilitate equitable learning experiences for all students.

1. What are common barriers to student learning in online environments?
2. Why is Universal Design for Learning (UDL) essential to support special populations of students?
3. How can I use Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles in online environments to support all students?



to Consider

Universal Design for Learning or UDL is a framework that guides the design of learning experiences to proactively meet the needs of all students. One of the main characteristics of the framework is the flexibility offered to learn in multiple ways. By providing flexible and barrier free learning opportunities, teachers can create more inclusive learning environments for their students. UDL is essential for special populations, which include special education, English language learner, and 504 students.

Accommodations refer to supports that facilitate learning the same material but in diverse ways. These supports remove barriers that may hinder the learning process, such as a single way of presenting learning materials or using the same assessment for all students. UDL facilitates the accommodation process by guiding the creation of lesson plans that provide multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expressions, reducing barriers for students. Adapting UDL principles and strategies is especially important for online environments because of how blended and online learning is quickly becoming normalized in the constantly evolving education system.

The UDL framework has three principles. The first principle is to provide multiple means of engagement, which prompts teachers to think of different ways to keep students engaged with instruction. For example, in online environments, teachers can assign tasks that encourage students to choose roles, self-reflect, and work together with classmates. Teachers can also prompt student engagement through online games during blended and online lessons using a tool such as Kahoot!. The second principle is to provide multiple means of representation, which encourages teachers to explore various methods of presenting information to reach all students. Instead of only lecturing to present instructional content, teachers can use multiple media such as audios, posters, games, and illustrations. In using audio and video alternatives, it is important to consider elements such as speech pacing, background noises, and visuals to accommodate the needs of all students. The third UDL framework principle is to provide multiple means of action and expression. This principle urges teachers to provide students opportunities to express responses or submissions through multiple means. Students can express what they have learned by creating their own videos, recording audio, and through drawings, paintings, or posters. Access to necessary tools and assistive technologies which help students express themselves effectively must be provided to promote student expression effectively and equitably.

Meeting the needs of all students, including special population students, can be challenging. However, by integrating the Universal Design for Learning principles in instruction, teachers can meet the needs of all students.

KEY Elements