From Access to Community:
A UDL Approach for Designing for Social Justice

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#UDL4Justice&Community
Chris: What’s the difference between this familiar blue and white icon of the International symbol of Access...
Matt: ...And this more active ISA representing an individual leaning forward in a wheelchair with arms pumping?

Chris: THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THESE TWO IMAGES ILLUSTRATES HOW WE CONCEIVE OF THE SHIFT IN SYSTEMS THINKING WHEN APPLYING UDL THROUGH A DISABILITY STUDIES IN EDUCATION LENS.
Matt: That said, who are the players in creating P-20 learning environments that are truly inclusive? How do we help these players embrace UDL? And, what characteristics of UDL training can move the concept of inclusion from one of access to one of community? (slide of system graphic)

Chris: Hi, I’m Chris, and I teach pre-service and in-service teachers. I can’t tell you how often I hear about schools and teachers who conceive of UDL as another word for accommodation.

Matt: And I’m Matt, an instructional designer and as a long time participant and facilitator of UDL Learning Communities, it is clear how our own understanding of the UDL Framework evolves as we work with it.
Matt: If you have observed your peers or students experiencing these types of *misconceptions or opportunities for new understandings - all the time*, point to 10:00, as Chris is doing here. If you have heard these types of *things only occasionally*, point to noon, and if you’ve *never heard these types of things*, point to 2:00.

Matt: [[quick verbal summary of participant numbers for 10, 12, 2]]

Matt: By the way, we call this assessment instrument the “point-o-meter” and we will use it again later in this session.
Chris: Seriously, we see these as significant issues for education. So, we’ve been engaged in research with pre-service teachers and the development of faculty learning communities in an effort to shift thinking about UDL to help create expert learners, teachers, and systems at Northern Arizona University.

Matt: This graphic attempts to illustrate the relationships we see among the players in our system, from pre-service teachers learning how to teach young students - to faculty learning how to teach graduate and undergraduate students... and even fossilized peers like Chris and me!
Hmmm…this system looks remarkably similar to a familiar image…
Chris: Right...there are many contexts in which UDL might have an impact, but we haven’t yet reached the tipping point at which UDL consistently represents inclusion and community. We believe that simply giving students access to learning opportunities (even while using UDL) is not social justice, particularly if those opportunities replicate traditionally exclusive systems.
Where To Start

Matt: Because we can’t really define a beginning to this cycle, Chris will start with the boring part, his research.
Chris: Hmmm...thanks Matt. There has historically been a philosophic divide between the fields of Special Education and Disability Studies in Education, or DSE. Disability Studies in Education views disability through a Social Model, which considers disability as a function of the environment, where Special Education has traditionally viewed disability through a Medical Model, where a disability is a deficit and something to be fixed.
Chris: However, both fields seem to agree on the use of UDL. I FOUND THIS SIMILARITY INTERESTING, GIVEN THE OTHERWISE TENSE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THESE TWO FIELDS.

So, I wondered whether training in UDL would actually change or reinforce beliefs about disability and inclusion. With Matt’s help...along with others, I created two online training modules on UDL. THE FIRST MODULE WAS FRAMED WITHIN THE MEDICAL MODEL AND THE SECOND WAS FRAMED WITHIN THE SOCIAL MODEL.
Matt: If you are curious, there are four tenets of Disability Studies in Education (DSE). They are:

• Contextualize disability within political and social spheres.
• Privilege the interest, agendas, and voices of people labeled with disability/disabled people.
• Promote social justice, equitable and inclusive educational opportunities, and full and meaningful access to all aspects of society for people labeled with disability/disabled people.
• Assume competence and reject the deficit models of disability.

(Valle & Connor, 2011, p. 30)

Chris: Nearly 80 preservice teachers completed one of the two randomly assigned modules. Those who completed the module framed in the social model had more inclusive beliefs about disability than those who completed the other module. More importantly, though, interview responses for those who completed the second module suggested the value of UDL as a means for developing an inclusive environment for all students, not just those with disabilities.
For example, one participant said, “So UDL is just about equality for me,” explaining that UDL creates an inclusive environment where all students have the same chances and nobody is segregated or singled out.
Chris: So what, right? What do we do with these findings in practice?

We believe that it isn’t enough to help teachers and faculty understand these principles. It’s our contention that infusing the tenets of DSE in UDL training at any level will help create social justice thinking among those who participate.
So, we want to share some of the concrete approaches we use to bolster the UDL framework with Disability Studies in Education. The first tenet of DSE is to “Contextualize disability within political and social spheres.” So, selecting instructional resources that frame the political and social histories of disabled individuals as a backdrop for discussing the equities inherent in UDL is one example of this tenet. One such resource is the film *Lives Worth Living*. 

Contextualizing Disability

- Beliefs about disability framed by:
  - the Economic,
  - Political,
  - Social, and
  - Environmental context.

- One Resource:
  - *Lives Worth Living* (Eric Neudel)
Privilege Individuals with Disabilities/Disabled Persons

- Use narratives of students with disabilities about their experiences in truly inclusive classrooms
  - *Students’ perceptions of classroom instructional environments in the context of Universal Design for Learning* (Abell, Jung & Taylor, 2011)
- View films/videos that represent experiences of disabled individuals in inclusive settings
  - *Deej*

Chris: The next tenet of DSE is to “Privilege the interest, agendas, and voices of people labeled with disability/ disabled persons.” We have included a list of resources on the handout. For example, there are some articles listed that focus on the narratives of disabled students about their experiences with UDL. Another example might be documentaries such as *Deej.*
The third tenet of DSE is to promote socially just, equitable, and inclusive experiences for people with disabilities or disabled persons.

Susan Baglieri, Jan Valle, David Connor, and Deb Gallagher wrote about the importance of UDL for recognizing and stopping educational practices that position general and special educators within different roles. This slide contains a couple of engaging TEDX videos by Dan Habib and Jennie Fenton, which are examples of some resources you could use.
Chris: Finally, assuming competence and rejecting deficit models of disability support the idea that UDL is a means for bringing students together within a community of learners, as opposed to segregating those who David Mitchell, Sharon Snyder, and Linda Ware refer to as “failed exceptions to the rule.” Stella Young, Todd Rose, and Amanda Baggs, among many others, make compelling arguments to this end.

Remember the...
Chris: Remember the “point-o-meter?”

If you have already used some or all of these strategies, please point to 10:00. If you have not used any of these strategies, but think you might, please point to noon, and if you haven’t used any of these strategies, but don’t think you will, please point to 2:00.

Matt: [[quick verbal summary of numbers for 10, 12, 2]]
Faculty Learning Communities on UDL

Faculty engaged by:

- Multiple types of resources and interactions
  - Readings - *UDL: theory and practice & UDL in the Cloud*
  - Videos/Podcasts
  - Described visuals
  - Opportunities to share discoveries and experiences
- Choices
- A concrete “project” at the end of the Learning Community

Matt: Chris used these strategies in his research study, but they are equally viable in Faculty Learning Communities. You will certainly have other UDL devotees at your school or on your campus other than yourselves. But how do you reach those who don’t know about UDL or don’t see its value? Since 2012, NAU has engaged faculty in five Learning Communities around the topic of UDL. And we are now transitioning to a Community of Practice. Some of the main ways that these communities have engaged faculty are... Multiple types of resources and interactions – Choices – and A concrete “project at the end of the Learning Community.

Chris: For example - Readings, Videos/Podcasts, Described Visuals, and most importantly – Opportunities to share discoveries and experiences.
Communities of Practice

- Learning Communities
  - Facilitated
  - Hope for the future...
    - Become colleagues in this cross-disciplinary space

- Communities of Practice
  - Begin to take control and take action and become a
  - Self-directed community developing UDL strategies

Matt: Learning Communities start off as facilitated engagements. However, the long-term hope is that these opportunities to share discoveries and experiences build true collegial relationships in a cross-disciplinary space where the people involved begin to take control and take action resulting in a self-directed Community of Practice. Here we continue to share approaches, methods, discoveries, and experiences and learn from each other while using the UDL framework as the cornerstone of our conversations.
Chris: One of the main benefits of these approaches has been that we are able to scale up the use and appreciation of UDL. Creating expert learners is a key focus of UDL. Understanding that this also requires expert teachers and expert systems is the impetus for determining the characteristics that create enduring motivation, knowledge and skills. The flexible learning environments that facilitate expert learning may require a shift in thinking about ability, and starting with a view of ability through a DSE lens may be such a starting place.
We encourage you to consider the development of a community of practice framed within the tenets of DSE to help move the perception of UDL...
Matt: ...from simply providing access for students with disabilities...
Matt: ...to the development of a socially-just community of learners.
Thank You!!!
For more information, remember the bit.ly and hashtag!