Universal Design for Learning: Going Beyond the Teacher's Manual

by Charmaine Thaner
charmaine@visionsandvoicestogether.com

"UDL is really a merging of general education and special education, a sharing of responsibility, resources and ownership. It gets away from the 'their kids/our kids' divide between general ed. and special ed." *David Rose*

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) has it roots in architecture. Architects discovered it made more sense and was more economical to plan buildings that were accessible for all instead of retrofitting them later. We have all benefited from elevators, ramps, and curb cuts. Educators have realized it makes more sense to have curricula, instructional strategies, and assessments developed so all learners can benefit instead of trying to make adaptations at a later time. All learners will benefit from Universal Design for Learning!

UDL provides multiple, flexible ways of presenting:
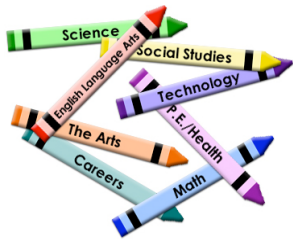
THE WHAT: RECOGNITION LEARNING
Multiple ways learners can gather facts and categorize the who, what, when, and where of specific content.
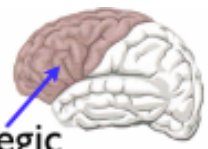
THE HOW: STRATEGIC LEARNING
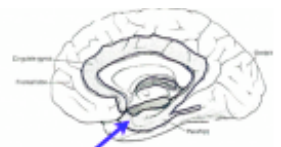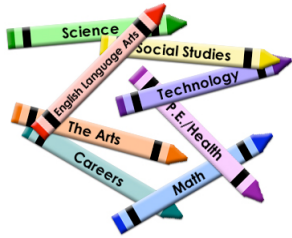Flexible ways students can plan, organize, and demonstrate their knowledge of concepts and skills.

THE WHY: AFFECTIVE LEARNING
Variety of ways learners can be engaged, challenged, excited, interested and stay motivated.

<u>**Students differ in the ways they take in content and comprehend information.**</u>

Teachers and families can:
* determine what is worth knowing and understanding
* decide what *all* students will be responsible for, what *most* students will be accountable for, & the concepts only some students are expected to demonstrate
* provide multiple examples and non-examples
* highlight critical features
* offer variety of media (print, video, audio, hands-on, software) and formats (cooperative learning groups, peer tutors, whole class)
* connect new learning to student's prior background knowledge

<u>**Learners differ in how they can show what they know and are able to do.**</u>

Families and educators can:
* provide materials that all students can interact with
* offer alternative modalities for expression (written, oral, illustration, demonstration)
* show models the demonstrate the same outcome, but were achieved through a variety of approaches
* give opportunities to practice skills in context (not isolation), with only the necessary supports, gradually fade supports
* provide on-going, specific feedback
* help develop self-monitoring skills so students can check their own progress and use the info to guide their own efforts and practice

<u>**Students differ in what interests them, what attracts their attention, and what will engage them in learning.**</u>

Teachers and families can:
* offer a variety of ways of gaining students' interest
* give choices and opportunities for personal control (types of recognition, tools used to gather information, types of product produced to show learning, setting academic and social goals).
* highlight how activities are relevant and useful to the student
* be aware of individual students' comfort levels for: change, sensory stimulation, social demands, and levels of challenge
* provide variety of ways (prompts, rubrics, checklists) students can develop internal control and coping skills