Successful Transition for Students with Special Needs: Advocating for Universal Design for Learning in Classrooms

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Today’s Presenter

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- Education:
  - Ph.D. in Educational Psychology
- Areas of Expertise:
  - Career Assessment
  - Post-Secondary Options for individuals with special needs
  - Special Education
  - Multicultural career counseling

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Successful Transition for Students with Special Needs: Advocating for Universal Design for Learning in Classrooms

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In this Session

- What is transition?
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles for instruction.
- Employability skills that can be taught using UDL principles.
- Ways in which parents/guardians and students can advocate for UDL to be incorporated in classrooms/teaching.

What is Transition?

- One of the most important goals of special education is the successful transition of students to post-secondary education/employment.
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that transition planning begin at the earliest age appropriate.
Required by Law in Public Schools

- For each student with a disability, beginning at age 16 (or younger, if determined appropriate by the Individualized Education Plan team), the IEP must include a statement of the student’s transition service needs focused on the student’s course of study (such as advanced academic courses, technical training, or intensive employment preparation).

Required by Law cont.

- The transition services' statement in an IEP can also state, if appropriate, a statement of interagency responsibilities.
- Also included are a coordinated set of activities with measurable outcomes that will move the student from school to post-school activities.
- Transition Goals in the IEP:

SCENARIO

TJ is a 15-year-old female with Down Syndrome and is entering public school. She was admitted to the 7th grade. It is summer and the parents have been invited to an IEP meeting.
Definition

- Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an educational approach for designing curriculum for all learners.
- Reduces barriers in learning.
- UDL is based on three principles.

Source: Adapted from: [http://www.cast.org/about/index.html](http://www.cast.org/about/index.html)

Principles of Universal Design for Learning

- Multiple means of representation, to give diverse learners options for acquiring information and knowledge
- Multiple means of action and expression, to give diverse learners options for demonstrating and acting upon information and knowledge
- Multiple means of engagement, to tap into learners’ interests, offer appropriate challenges, and increase motivation
Representation

Teachers using representation will:
- Use captions or speech-to-text software for spoken language.
- Use realia, physical objects and models to teach theoretical concepts.
- Use a variety of text, illustrations, photographs and videos to teach key concepts.
- Change the contrast, colors or background texture to clarify text and images.
- Explain complex syntax by offering simpler sentences.

Representation Strategies Cont’d

- Explain key concepts using analogies and metaphors.
- Provide outlines and graphic organizers that highlight key ideas and relationships.
- Use cues and prompts to reiterate critical features.
- Encourage the use of mnemonic strategies, visual imagery and paraphrasing.

Scenario

- TJ is very interested in animals and nature.
- She likes watching nature movies and loves petting zoos.
- She likes reading and likes being read to.
- TJ’s teacher who uses UDL representation will:
  - Use flash cards.
  - Large font – PowerPoint
  - Videos
  - Arrange field trips where students can learn from touching
  - What else?
Action and Expression

Teachers providing action and expression-based UDL will:

- Model for students or demonstrate examples of the process and products.
- Offer guides and checklists to encourage goal-setting.
- Provide representations of progress (e.g., before and after photos; graphs and charts showing progress over time).

Action and Expression Strategies Cont’d

- Present key concepts in different forms for e.g. text and illustration, photograph, video etc.
- Clarify complex syntax by offering simpler sentence alternatives.
- Pre-teach vocabulary and symbols such that they connect to students' life experiences and prior knowledge.

Scenario

- TJ draws and sketches at home.
- One of her favorite things to do is provide “voiceover” for people talking on TV.
- She especially enjoys shows that feature talking animals.
- TJ prefers not being in a large group, too many people in a room can be overwhelming for her.

TJ's teacher who uses UDL action and expression will:

- Provide students choice on how they will want to submit an assignment.
- Use pictures of before and after examples.
- Allow students to provide oral input in class.
- Use small group/pair activities.
- What else?
Engagement
Teachers providing engagement-based UDL will:
- Design activities so that outcomes are authentic, can be communicated to real audiences, and are purposeful.
- Invite students to provide personal responses, evaluation, and self-reflection.
- Give students as much discretion and autonomy as possible.

Engagement Strategies Cont’d
- Ensure the division of long-term goals into short-term objectives.
- Offer prompts that guide students in when and how to ask for help.
- Provide feedback that encourages perseverance and focuses on development of efficacy and self-awareness.

Scenario
- TJ enjoys "commentating."
- She has good skills for summarizing what she has heard.
- TJ doesn’t write a lot but has the habit of noting down important stuff in a journal.
- Teacher who provides engagement-based UDL will:
  - Show TJ examples of a well-written essay and one that is not.
  - Show her how to reflect and explain what she has learned using a bulleted list.
  - Ask TJ (when she is in small groups or in a pair) – so what do you think?
  - What else?
UDL-Based Employability Skills

Teachers who infuse employability skills into their classroom curriculum:

- Use group assessment sessions where possible.
- Utilize contextual learning experiences to amalgamate workplace and classroom learning experiences.
- Incorporate worksite learning opportunities, e.g. field trips.
- Provide students with current labor market information.

Employability Skills cont’d

- Expand the range of resources for career guidance information by making optimal use of the Internet and additional computer-based packages.
- Develop ways of exposing students of both genders to a wider range of occupational options.
- Use direct observation and recordings of a student’s performance in the local curriculum (i.e. measure basic skills) as a basis for gathering information to encourage career-related decision-making.

Scenario

- TJ’s UDL-informed teacher will:
  - Assess her students career interests - https://access.bridges.com/auth/educator/login.do?loginTheme=professional
  - Bring in a vet to guest lecture.
  - Allow for therapy animals to visit the class.
  - Arrange for voluntary experiences.
  - What else?
Benefits of UDL

- All students can benefit from UDL-based instruction.
- UDL principles encourage learners to pursue transition success.
- UDL instruction induces teachers to provide flexible curricula (goals, methods, materials, and assessments) from the start, which meet the needs of all learners.

Helping Parents/Guardians Advocate for UDL

- Encourage parents and their children to ask lots of questions.
- Introduce parents and students to UDL and its benefits.
- Help parents realize the value of a good teacher and the pathways they can provide for student’s transition.
- Provide parents with information to help them recognize* the UDL-related abilities of teachers.

Helping Parents/Guardians Advocate for UDL Cont.

- Ask parents to look over class syllabus.
- Encourage parents to have conversations with their children as to what they like about their teacher’s teaching style.
- Help parents “train” teachers on UDL and particularly help teachers recognize* the UDL principles they already implement.
- Remind parents to make notes of their children’s skills and ask that teachers utilize appropriate UDL principles.
- *Refer to handouts.
## Conclusion

Planning for transition can be a daunting process for students with special needs and their parents. Participating in the special education process actively is a good step forward, however it is necessary for parents/guardians to recognize the ready source of help - their students’ teacher. By advocating for the use of Universal Design for Learning principles, parents and guardians can ensure that a student’s naturally occurring environment propagates transition skills in the most accessible manner possible.

## Contact Information

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