

Mastery Teaching and Universal Design in Learning

There are many universal design techniques that instructors can use in their classes that not only benefit students with disabilities but also benefit all their students. Universal design techniques support a learning environment that enables instruction and assessment to be the best possible for a diverse group of students including those from different cultures, ages, and learning styles as well as those with and those without disabilities. Here are a few techniques you might find helpful. For more techniques in universal design in learning, visit <http://www.udeducation.org/teach/index.asp>.

Assessment and Assignments

- Encourage students to anticipate test questions by creating a test bank. This could be an ongoing assignment. After each class they can write and answer questions they think could be on a test.
- When announcing what tests will cover, also announce the type of item and directions they will encounter. Give this information in writing as well as orally.
- Design clear test formats, typed and well spaced. Make directions concise and clear. Avoid using double negatives.
- Provide more frequent, shorter tests as opposed to a few comprehensive tests. Review material before mid-term and final exams.
- Review returned tests and challenge students to think of what they will continue doing or will do differently on the next test. Have them think about how they studied, when they started studying for the test, if they studied the right things, if they could have used tutoring, if they understood the directions, etc.
- Include variety in assessment approaches. For example, on tests avoid a strictly T/F format on every test. Some students do better on short answer, some on multiple choice, etc. Some students do better in presenting a project.
- When possible, give students choices in activities, projects, and assignments to earn their points.
- Avoid bright florescent paper and dark paper with black letters. Basically, keep the paper and print easy on the eyes and readable. Ivory is often a good choice for a test since white reflects the overhead lighting more. Ask your students which colors are best and worst for them. This could be part of the get acquainted activity at the start of the semester.
- Say as well as write assignments.
- When giving assignments, incorporate suggestions on how to study.
- Brainstorm with students what they should be giving themselves to do when no assignment is given.

Documents/Visuals

- Make your syllabus more graphic by incorporating charts, maps, and photos when appropriate.
- Use opportunities to post your syllabus, assignments, announcements, links, and other key documents online such as a faculty website, use of Blackboard, and the Smart Start Network.
- Keep a class note-book on the reserve shelf in the library. Add to this book after each class.
- Provide an outline before lectures to focus attention. This could be posted online, a handout at the start of class, topics on the board, or using transparencies or slides.
- Make key words and concepts stand out through bolding, color, or highlighting.
- Use a lot of visuals. Concept maps help students see the associations between concepts faster than text.
- Incorporate color in visuals to focus attention, aid memory, aid organization, and tap into whole brain learning.
- Use art in visuals to focus attention, assist memory, and tap into whole brain learning. Simple visuals such as the chalkboard and slides help students remember points from a lecture better.
- Use photos whenever possible along with written directions to identify steps in a process.
- Incorporate critical viewing skills and media awareness when using media.

Encouragement

- Call on all students giving all a chance to participate.
- Use positive quotes and affirmations. One way to do this is to include a positive quote on a sign-in attendance sheet.
- Teach students to value their mistakes and learn from them. A good way to do this is to have the student reflect on what the error is, what the correct answer is, and why. Then they can make corrections. In writing, for example, students can submit a draft, receive feedback, look up their error codes, make corrections, and answer reflection questions. This helps them gain awareness of their strengths, weak spots, what helped them, what might be blocking them, and what they can do about it to improve in their next writing.

The First Day

- Welcome them. Be positive.
- Include getting to know you activities at the beginning of the semester that not only help students become acquainted with you and each other, but also give you insight into your students deficits, strengths, learning style, and motivations in learning.

Using Technology

- Create MP3 and text files to post online. For example, you can personalize directions for assignments including pointers and reminders where to get help if needed.
- Use hyperlinks on line to provide more information.
- Use closed captioning for videos. Describe the video before students view it and review it afterwards. For more on closed captioning, visit <http://www.eonline.org>.

- Encourage your students to use technology. Although students text each other a lot, many are not used to using e-mail to learn, educational links, or going into a class site such as My Courses.

Strategies

- Review at the beginning of class to reinforce and associate material taught in the previous class with material to be taught.
- Say key words when writing them on the board. Saying them slowly and clarifying syllables and spelling is helpful. Repeat them. Point out meaning in affixes and roots.
- Look at students when talking. Make eye contact with all students in the room. When writing on the board or on a transparency, write large and clearly. Keep only what is needed on the board.
- Shut the door. Keep as many distractions as possible out of the room.
- Keep up an organized, fluid pace when teaching that is not too fast and not too slow, but when asking questions, allow sufficient time for thinking and answering.
- While providing a variety of activities, maintain a structure and rhythm to class so students will know what to expect.
- Give specific feedback frequently.
- Check often to see if students understand what you are teaching. For example, ask questions, plan a short activity, have a brief pen and paper practice.
- If you see some students have difficulty with oral reading, but you want all students to participate in some oral reading, assign a passage ahead of time so they can prepare for this activity.
- Use symbols and abbreviations to organize material and in giving feedback, but be sure all students understand the symbols and abbreviations you use.
- If you have visually impaired students, be sure to read what you write on the board.
- After teaching a few concepts, stop and allow students to process this information through some type of activity, such as, having them work in pairs with students explaining the concepts to each other. Encourage them to ask questions when they get stuck.
- Promote note-taking in a variety of ways: highlighting and margin notes in the book when the lecture closely follows the book, taking notes from the board and/or transparencies, making notes in the margin of handouts, doing note cards, sharing notes, supplementing notes by reading the text, using a class notebook that is housed in the library, taping notes, making a summary map, making key work and concept lists.
- If a student has a sign language interpreter, remember that the interpreter is there to sign for the instructor and voice for the student. Talk directly to the student.
- Provide an ending to class: summary, reflection on a difficult concept and/or previewing the goals for the next class.
- Incorporate techniques used in accelerated learning.
- In classes that go beyond 50 minutes, incorporate some movement: a brain gym activity, standing up, deep breathing.

- Help your students to open their senses to what they are learning. For example, if you are teaching about a battle in history, ask students to describe what they see, hear, smell, feel, and taste.
- Use a multi-sensory approach. Be aware that many students are more visual, tactile, or kinesthetic in their approach to learning than strictly auditory. Remember that auditory means not only listening to a lecture, but discussion. Some students learn best when they can talk through an idea with another person.
- Teach the same concept in different ways.
- Review frequently. Give specific feedback. Provide frequent progress updates.
- When possible, present synonyms or short phrases along with key terms. These are easier to remember than long definitions.