

Short Commentary

Universal Design for Learning: A Framework for Education in Nursing

Prof. Sherrilyn Coffman PhD, RN, COI*

Nevada State College, Henderson, NV 89015, Nevada, United States

*Corresponding Author: Prof. Sherrilyn Coffman PhD, RN, COI, Nevada State College, Henderson, Nevada, USA; Tel: +17022742338; E-mail: Sherrilyn.Coffman@nsc.edu

Received: May 20, 2019; Accepted: May 28, 2019; Published: May 31, 2019;

Universal design for learning (UDL) is a framework that arose from a desire to provide greater educational opportunities for all learners. In the 1980's, educators working with children with disabilities began utilizing new computer technologies to foster learning. Their approaches were successful in decreasing limitations created by print-based materials. The educators quickly realized that it was the curriculum, rather than the learners, that created barriers to learning. This new approach became known as universal design for learning—a way of thinking about the teaching / learning process that gives all individuals an equal opportunity to succeed [1].

Today, educators are exploring new ways to meet the needs of diverse learners, using new technologies and activities. The UDL approach offers flexibility in the ways students access material, engage with it and show what they know. Societal values and expectations are changing as well. Our expectations for learning are rising as we find new ways to provide a relevant education for *all* learners. Educators are becoming more savvy at presenting information directed to a variety of senses (auditory, visual, kinesthetic), assessing and meeting the motivational needs of learners, and utilizing social interaction and teamwork to maximize learning. New approaches for designing learning environments are supporting high expectations for a wide variety of individuals. These innovations are directed at change in the curriculum and not the learner.

Using new approaches, educators recognize the need to make education more responsive to learner differences [1]. The education community realizes that many individuals, and not just those with disabilities, face barriers and impediments that interfere with learning. Likewise, the learning environment and the learner's self-awareness play a huge role in whether a given condition is disabling or not. UDL principles are being applied in K-12 and higher education, and are equally relevant to patient and staff education within healthcare organizations. Following principles of UDL, educators begin with high standards for all learners and use a variety of activities to help each learner find appropriate challenges and supports for learning.

The three core principles of the UDL framework outlined by Meyer et al. [1] are as follows:

- Multiple means of engagement
- Multiple means of representation
- Multiple means of action and expression

Engagement

Providing multiple means of engagement composes the “why” of learning. Engagement means helping learners develop interest and motivation. The ability to self-regulate their own learning (maintaining control) is key. Successful learners set their own objectives and work toward meeting those goals. Learners maintain a balance between personal motivation and the demands of others. This balance is monitored by learners, so that they can adjust their behaviors and strategies as needed. The teacher's role in this phase of the learning process is to stimulate interest and motivation for learning [1].

Representation

Providing multiple means of representation refers to the “what” of learning. According to Meyer et al. [1] the teacher's role is to present content and information in different ways to accommodate a variety of learning styles and preferences. Learners show variability in how they perceive information in the environment, understand and integrate new information, and develop skills to assimilate and remember information. The medium itself may be a barrier; for example a blind person requires audio information. When content is represented through two or more mediums, such as text, images, video, or audio, more learners can benefit.

Action and Expression

Providing multiple means of action and expression focuses on the “how” of learning. Methods by which learners express what they have learned varies in different levels of learners. Novice learners model demonstration by the teacher, with support to implement new skills. As learners gain experience, they become more independent in setting goals and monitoring their performance. The more difficult the task, the more learners must interact with others, to learn standards and receive feedback. Ultimately, the teacher's role is to create learning activities and define appropriate ways that students can demonstrate new skills and knowledge [1].

Most references that focus on UDL as a learning framework come from academic or formal education settings [1]. Examples are more easily transferred to these educational settings, e.g. teaching students in a school of nursing or providing staff education in a healthcare agency. More exploration is needed regarding how UDL principles can be applied to individual patient/family education provided by

nursing staff. Nurses as patient educators have too long relied on print media to share information with patients and families. While many hospital and outpatient systems have developed video libraries for patient education, these resources are developed for groups, or “the average patient.” Nurse educators need to explore how to individualize the teaching plan for each individual patient, drawing upon group resources. Nurses can better engage patients by making use of “teachable moments” when patients or family members are more open to health promotion information, improving skills, or learning about a physiological process.

While academic and staff educators deal with curriculum and teach groups of students, individual nurses often teach patients one-on-one. In all these educator roles, nurses can learn more about how and when to engage learners in a targeted exchange of information. By using multiple means of representation, i.e. a variety of teaching resources that address different learning styles, their message is more likely to reach diverse learners. Likewise, they need to be open to multiple means of expression, encouraging each learner to become more self-directed and more proficient at self-care. By encouraging learners to act in ways that fit their lifestyle, expressions of learning will be more effective and empowering. For additional information on UDL, go to www.CAST.org.

Reference

1. Meyer A, Rose D, Gordon D (2014) Universal design for learning: Theory and practice. Wakefield, MA: CAST Professional Publishing.

Citation:

Sherrilyn Coffman PhD, RN, COI (2019) Universal Design for Learning: A Framework for Education in Nursing. *ARCH Women Health Care* Volume 2(3): 1–2.