III. Tool Three:
“How Do I Include More Kids?”

Introduction

In Tool One we defined the model and presented ways to assess social cognitive skills. More specifically, we presented the social-cognitive model and also explained ways to systematically observe your students’ ability to perform the processes, or “social thinking skills” presented in the model. In Tool Two, we offered ideas about what to teach. That is, Tool Two offered instructional practice interventions to use when presenting planned social skills instruction as well as for use when incorporating social skills instruction into your everyday classroom environment and routine, your English Language Arts lessons, and your impromptu responses to spontaneous social situations that pop up throughout the school day.

In the final tool, Tool Three, we offer tips on how to teach social cognitive skills with a focus on inclusion. Tool Three includes information on how to design lessons that include all of your students. Throughout Tool Three we ask you to examine your own instructional practices with an eye towards increasing the participation of students who learn differently.

In Tool Three: “How do I include more kids?” the following questions are addressed:

• How can I reach students who think and learn differently?
• What can be built into lessons that will not take hours to prepare?
• What “best practices” can be used to teach social thinking skills?

First, we pull the main ideas from Universal Design for Learning, which is a way to think about designing your instruction for a classroom full of student who think and learn differently. Next, we will borrow three validated teaching practices used primarily for content instruction: graphic organizers, collaborative groups and explicit instruction. You’ll find nifty graphic organizers of our own that contain specific instruction ideas for using the three validated practices and Universal Design for learning features within your lessons.

In the final section of Tool Three you will find additional illustrations of the use of validated practices for social skills instruction that include ideas for including a wider range of learners. How is this different from above? We hope that these examples stimulate you to think about how you can expand the reach of your own instructional practice to include even more students who think and learn differently.

http://www.csde.umb.edu/tools
With individual learning styles and abilities in mind, educators vary the complexity of the information they present, how they present it, and how they assess if a student grasped the essential knowledge, skills and concepts. Wow - such a balancing act teachers perform daily!

Some educators found that the information presented in this next section stimulated their thinking and allowed them to make connections to a respected teaching model they were familiar with: Universal Design for Learning.

Others groaned to be reading about yet an additional “model” and skipped ahead to the next section on validated practices.

The choice is yours!

UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

In this section we first pull the main ideas from a popular approach to designing curricula so that you can begin to think about reaching a classroom full of students who think and learn differently. The approach is: Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL was developed by a group of talented educators in the Greater Boston area more than 20 years ago when the Center for Applied Special Technologies (CAST) was formed (www.cast.org). The UDL approach is described more fully in numerous publications that include the brain-based theoretical foundation, the UDL model and examples. (References to some of these works can be found in Appendix J) Overall, it’s a deceptively simple set of principles that:

- Begins with the premise that learners differ greatly.
- Recommends that the educator use several ways to arrange and deliver content.
- Promotes the educator to use several ways to assess students.
- Advocates that educators attend to ways to engage all learners
The UDL approach focuses upon how to use the vast array of teaching approaches available to reach students who learn differently in the classroom. The intent of UDL is to reach a wide range of learners and its principles are theoretically linked to networks within the brain that enable people to recognize new information based upon prior knowledge, to strategically use the knowledge and demonstrate what one knows, and to engage with the knowledge so that learning about it matters. However, the approach is less focused upon the specific techniques themselves - that’s up to the teacher. In fact, the Principles of UDL urge us to identify multiple ways to present, assess, and motivate our students, but do not specify what those particular ways to present, assess, and motivate might be (Rose & Meyer, 2002).

The Principles of Universal Design are:

- Multiple means of representation: to provide learners with various ways of acquiring information and knowledge (related to the recognition network in the brain);

- Multiple means of expression: to provide learners alternatives for demonstrating what they know (related to the strategic network in the brain); and,

- Multiple means of engagement, to tap into learners’ interests, offer appropriate challenges, and increase motivation (related to the affective network in the brain).

The UDL Principles provide a useful framework for designing our curriculum to teach social thinking skills to a wide range of learners. We are left free to select the specific multiple ways to present, assess and engage students from our own experiences, curricula we find effective, a student’s IEP, ideas “borrowed” from colleagues, and those presented in formal curriculum and instructional packages. The national UDL Consortium, developed by CAST, also offers teaching approaches and materials that can be used to implement the UDL Principles which can be found on their website (http://www.cast.org/pd/consortium/index.html). The charge we are given from UDL is to make certain that we provide multiple ways for students to actively participate in each aspect of the learning process, respecting their individual abilities, challenges, learning styles and preferences.

That is, UDL asks us to select multiple approaches for presenting content; stressing the need to provide multiple means for students to obtain, interact, make meaning and practice with the content presented. For example, a UDL approach to learning can rely upon the use of technology to practice each of the UDL principles. What if your students included some who are English language learners, two with learning disabilities in reading, and another classmate with a visual impairment? Each might experience a “print disability” in that none of them gain an understanding of the assigned story from reading the book itself. A teacher could make the same content available to these students through the use of an audio version, a digitized version with accompanying software program that would read the text aloud, or a film version. More specific examples of using technology to support students’ acquisition of content are provided below for those who are interested. Most of the links and recommendations below come from the CAST website, www.cast.org.
Multiple Approaches to Presenting a Literature Lesson
Using Technology for Students who Learn Differently

Listening to audio-taped versions of the same literature book
- Audio tape or CD of the book available through the local library
- Audio recording made of the book by a volunteer
- Audio recording made by “Recordings for the Blind and Dyslexic” for students with visual impairments and learning disabilities (http://www.rfbd.org)

Listening and viewing the same literature book on a computer
(combining a digitized version of the literature book with a text to speech software program)
- How to scan a literature book to obtain a digitized version
  http://www.cast.org/system/galleries/download/pdResources/tts.doc#converting
- Use combination programs such as the reading, writing, and learning software produced by Kurzweil Educational Systems that both scans and reads
- Obtain a free electronic version download from a repository of e-texts
  http://www.cast.org/system/galleries/download/pdResources/tts.doc#acquiring
- How to obtain a text-to-speech software program to “read” the digitized literature book
  Here’s a link of descriptions of 12 different text-t-speech software programs, including one available on your PC computer—some are free.
  http://www.cast.org/system/galleries/download/pdResources/srsoftware.doc

Viewing the book
- Borrow the movie version of the same literature book from local library or video store
- Preview the movie version so that you can assist the students with understanding the differences in content between the print and film versions.

In summary, using audio, digitized and film versions by all students, not only those with print challenges, utilizes the first UDL Principle - multiple means of representation - in that:

- The audio versions provide variety in learning the story and can convey dramatic interpretations of scenes that emerging readers might not be able to convey. Also, audio versions can be used on bus rides and digitized versions take up less room in backpacks. Digitized versions can be emailed or linked to home computers.

- You might wish to use segments from the film version with the entire class to notice social cues, identify ways the characters solved the problems, and describe the consequences of their solutions. Students could then brainstorm or act out alternate solutions.

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UDL also advocates assessing students by using *multiple forms of* products and techniques (second UDL Principle). A retired colleague, Professor Emeritus in the Classics Department of a prestigious university, once complained about the modern approaches to assessment. He was shocked to report that colleagues would assess students by “…asking them to dance, to sing, to skip around, to recite poetry…. Why don’t they just plain ol’ assess ‘em anymore?”

Well, Fred has retired, leaving many of us to devise appropriate alternatives that will more accurately assess the knowledge and skills we are teaching. For example, if we are assessing a students’ ability to understand the goal of a character in a particular story and the strategy the character selected to reach this goal, we might give the students a printed handout with questions and spaces for written responses. As such, we are not only testing a student’s ability to decode the social situation, but also to read printed text. Let’s consider the students described earlier in Tool Three who are “print disabled.” We are unlikely to assess what they know about the character’s social thinking skills unless we remove the barrier created by the chosen assessment format. Certainly, the alternate assessment approaches must each be valid ways to gather information about what the students know. Allowing for more choice among the type and variety of approaches and assessments in an effort to meet the needs of a diverse group of learners also supports the third UDL Principle, finding *multiple ways to engage* students.

**How do I use the Principles of UDL in my classroom?**

The following are two examples of how UDL principles are applied in the classroom. The first example depicts students from a typical first grade classroom working on improving their ability to notice non-verbal cues that convey emotions. In the second example, students in a fifth grade general education classroom use literature to practice generating and selecting strategies to solve social problems. Both examples illustrate how to present content and provide assessments in multiple modes so that classrooms full of diverse learners can acquire knowledge and skills and demonstrate what they have learned in ways that can be motivating.
Grade One Social Thinking Skills Lesson Using Principals of UDL

**Example 1:** First grade students are learning to notice social cues, using the UDL Principles. In this class, while some of students appear to know when a peer is sad or angry, others do not.

**Instructional Objective:** By the end of the lesson, students will demonstrate their ability to notice and identify 3 additional non-verbal social cues.

**Readiness Levels:** 10 students can identify the 6 basic emotions and emotional states; 4 students can identify happy and sad; 2 students can make happy and sad faces but are not yet able to identify happy and sad faces of others.

To address this discrepancy in skills we present the content in multiple ways. That is, we use different media that focus upon our targeted social cues - feelings conveyed by facial expression and non-verbal body language. We show pictures of people who are expressing a range of feelings and use puppets to act out some of the feelings. Students are asked to show us what it looks like when they experience a certain feeling, or asked to act out the feelings in the pictures and ask classmates to guess. Peer models are used in activities in ways that address their own individual level of understanding. For example, students who are more knowledgeable about noticing feelings make up social situations with puppets and ask other peers how one might feel in that situation. **Multiple techniques to assess** learning include observations of the puppet skit, making faces, and verbally naming emotions. The puppets, demonstrations, self-expression, role-playing and guessing allow participation from students with various levels of understanding and prior knowledge, certain to engage almost everybody.

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<th>Universal Design for Learning: Example 1</th>
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<td><strong>UDL Principle #1:</strong> present information in more than one way (to ensure that the representation networks in the brain can identify the information).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Show pictures of faces expressing emotions and emotion states</td>
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<td>Ask students to make faces expressing emotions for others to study and describe.</td>
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<td><strong>UDL Principle #2:</strong> offer students more than one way to interact with the content to ensure that they are able to demonstrate what they know (ensuring they are accessing the strategic networks in the brain).</td>
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<td>Use puppets to act out feelings</td>
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<td>Ask student to locate the feeling faces in magazines to create the pictures used in lesson</td>
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<td>Ask students who can already identify several feeling states to pair up with others who cannot. Trade off using puppets to act out feeling pictures.</td>
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<td><strong>UDL Principle #3:</strong> make sure that students are engaged in the lesson, without which learning is compromised. (Engagement activates the affective networks of the brain.)</td>
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<td>Provide a variety of opportunities to participate such as listening and watching, acting out with puppets, or own facial expressions. Include verbal and non-verbal performance assessments.</td>
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Example 2: Students in a fifth grade classroom are using their assigned literature text, Number the Stars (Lowry, Lowry, & Sanz, 1990) to practice generating and selecting strategies to solve social problems. Using the Universal Design for Learning principles, the teacher has presented the content in multiple ways, and offered several options for assessment. In this class, while most of the students appear to know what a strategy is, only some are able to justify why one strategy might meet the character’s goals better than another strategy.

Instructional Objective: By the end of the lesson, students will demonstrate the ability to identify 3 strategies used by characters in the text to meet his or her goal, tell what happened as a result of using the strategy, and if the outcome met the character’s intent or goal.

Readiness Levels: Twenty out of twenty-two students can identify the strategy used by a character to solve a problem within the text. Ten students can identify the strategy used by a character in the story and tell what the character wanted to happen as a result of using the strategy.

To address the Instructional Objective and the discrepancy in skills we present the content in multiple ways. That is, we use different media focusing upon our targeted social thinking skill—generating and selecting strategies. We provide the text in an audio format for students who experience difficulty reading the text, and in Spanish/English for those who are more fluent in Spanish. One advantage of the audio version is that the reader uses different voice qualities to depict the different characters. Further, the background music draws attention to the intensity of situations that call for swift decision making.

We also use collaborative groups where students are assigned to generate alternate strategies for various scenes and then act them out for their peers. Students could then discuss the benefits and disadvantages of both the strategies used within the book and the alternatives provided by their classmates. Multiple techniques to assess learning includes having the individual student analysis of the various strategies given orally during the discussions following the role playing, an assignment sheet requesting the same information, or another strategy acted out by individual students. The choices of assessments and variety of text formats allow participation from students with varying levels of understanding and prior knowledge, certain to engage almost everybody.