

## Arts Integration Connections

# Arts Integration and Universal Design for Learning

Explore the powerful alignment between arts integration and three principles that guide Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

## Article

### Universal Design for Learning

The goal of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is to provide equal opportunity for all students to learn<sup>2</sup>. The impetus for Universal Design for Learning has been the belief that many students (e.g., students with disabilities, English language learners) access to learning has been unequal. Some believe that unequal access has resulted from a reliance on teaching strategies that use only traditional forms of instruction (e.g., lectures, learning from textbooks). With the growing diversity of students in classrooms and a deeper understanding of how students learn, educators have been taking a fresh look at making teaching and learning accessible to all students.

Universal Design, with roots in the design of accessible physical spaces, has been applied to learning<sup>3</sup>. The Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) discusses UDL in terms of multiples<sup>4</sup>:

#### 1. Multiple means of Representation

Teachers present information in different ways, using alternative means for the delivery of information.

#### 2. Multiple means of Action and Expression

Teachers provide a variety of ways for students to actively construct and demonstrate their understanding.

#### 3. Multiple means of Engagement

Teachers involve students in learning activities that optimize individual choice and autonomy, are authentic, and as a result, are motivating and engaging.

There is a powerful alignment between **arts integration** and these three UDL principles. The arts provide a multitude of ways to represent information, multiple ways for students to construct and demonstrate their developing understandings, and multiple ways to capture interest and engage students in learning.

### Multiple Means of Representation

The arts, in their many forms (dance, drama, music, visual arts, literary arts, and media arts), offer alternative means for representing information.

Arts integration offers a variety of ways for teachers to represent content through multiple learning modalities—visual, aural, and kinesthetic—and as a result, reach a wider range of learners. For example, in the visual arts, teachers use line, shape, color, texture, and form to represent content. In music, teachers use rhythm, melody, and sound patterns to represent content; and in dance, content is represented through bodily motion with varying forms of energy in space and time. In drama, teachers use both language and physical expression as a means of representing content.

### Multiple Means of Action and Expression

Arts integration engages students in the creative process which offers a universal pathway to learning. Students 1) imagine, examine, and perceive; 2) explore,

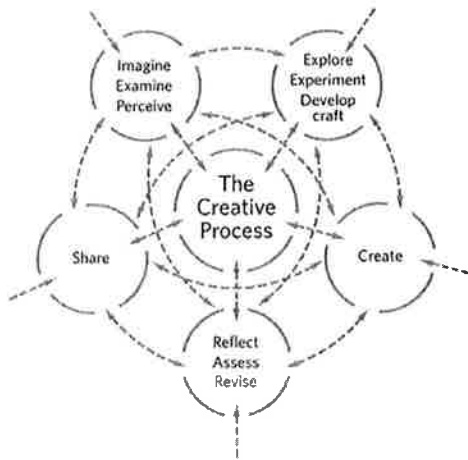
### Graphic Organizer



(click to enlarge)

*"To accommodate a broad spectrum of learners, universally designed curricula require a range of options for accessing, using, and engaging with learning materials. Like universal design in architecture, with its stairs, ramps, and elevators, these alternatives reduce barriers for individuals with disabilities but also enhance opportunities for every student."<sup>4</sup>*





experiment, and develop craft; 3) create; 4) reflect, assess, and revise, and 5) share their products with others. Through the creative process, students build and express their understanding of an area of study and the art form, using the wide variety of languages and formats that the arts offer. Each art form has a myriad of adaptations to accommodate various learning needs<sup>6</sup>.

The creative process is accessible to all learners. It's flexible and can be altered and adapted to fit an individual student's needs. Students can enter the process at different places and move within it at different rates and in different sequences. While the creative process is flexible, it is not unstructured. Students plan and carry out strategies to reach a goal. Throughout the creative process students monitor their progress and make adjustments along the way to better reach a goal.

For example, to create a collage that demonstrates the differing perspectives about an era of history, students develop a plan of action. Working within the flexible creative process, some students will research first, some will begin to create by

cutting and assembling fabrics, string, and papers, while others might begin by sketching the overall composition. The sequence for creating does not have to be the same for every student. Although students have a common goal, their process for reaching the goal is individualized.

Additionally, the criteria for participation in the creative process are broad and inclusive. For example, in theater everyone can have a part. For some that may mean verbal participation, such as speaking alone, or as part of a group. Others may be involved in non-verbal ways, through stage action or mime. Further adaptations to individual needs are possible because the arts have a strong tradition of crossing boundaries—a play can have silence, a dance can have words, a musical composition can be presented with visual art. Arts integration provides a place for every student's participation and every student is involved in an authentic task.

Arts integration also involves students in ongoing reflection and self-assessment. Because the products students create are concrete and visible—a dance sequence, a musical composition, a poem, a collage, a dramatic improvisation—it is possible for students (and teachers, too) to examine their progress and reflect on what is working well and what needs improvement.

### Multiple Means of Engagement

Arts integration is naturally engaging. Opportunities for individual choice, autonomy, and self-regulation abound. Students are engaged in collaborative learning experiences with peers in which they share and build on each other's ideas, consider options, make decisions, compromise honorably, and learn to work together to achieve a shared goal. Coping skills and strategies are embedded in the process.

For example, when students are given a problem to solve, such as to demonstrate their understanding of a moment in history through a drama, they must draw on what they know (both about drama and history), plan which drama strategies will be most effective for the moment they are depicting, work with their peers to carry out the plans, assess and revise their drama as they rehearse, work together to perform their drama, and reflect on how well it met the criteria for quality. Since students have limited time to create their dramas, there is also a natural pressure and energy that feeds their engagement. At the conclusion, students reflect and self-assess their work, their peers' work, and consider their next steps.

### Conclusion

Arts integration and UDL are natural partners. The arts offer teachers multiple means for providing information to a wide range of learners, multiple means for all students to make sense of and express their understandings, and multiple means for engaging all students in participatory, collaborative, authentic, and energizing learning experiences.

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