Proposal for the 2011 Education Graduate Student Symposium

UNIVERSAL DESIGN IN EDUCATION:
THE MISSING LINK?

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ABSTRACT

Although Universal Design (UD) was initially an architectural construct, the term is now used in a wide range of disciplines including education. Proponents believe that implementing UD principles will meet the needs of the broadest range of learners; not with a “one size fits all” answer for everyone, but rather through flexible curricular materials and activities. Skeptics argue that UD principles cannot be successfully transferred from one discipline (architecture) to another (education).

Using the critical analytical tools of the immanent critique, genealogy, and the ideal type critique (Skrtic, 1995); the practical and theoretical benefits, advantages, and potential as well as the challenges, problems, and limitations of Universal Design in education are explored in this study. Finally, the implications of UD in teaching, learning, and possible areas for future research are discussed.

Using a mixed method research approach of qualitative and quantitative research methods, I conducted a study that specifically explores educators’ and students’ perceptions of UD aligned teaching practices and their influence on the teaching and learning of students, and assesses the differences and similarities between student learning in two comparable classes studying the same senior high novel unit: with one class using UD aligned practices and the other class using traditional methods. While my study was unable to determine if implementing the
principles of UD improved learning outcomes, it supports the notion that UD may help teachers provide more inclusive educational settings.