

UDL and Social Emotional Learning: The Why

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Hi everyone, my name is Lisa Bosio and I work with and am a consultant with Novak Educational Consulting. And I'm so excited to be here with you today to discuss how the UDL framework encompasses social and emotional learning so that all of our students can become those expert learners.

So, let's talk about, why Universal Design for Learning?

When I think about Universal Design for Learning as a UDL practitioner, I think about what is the ultimate goal? The ultimate goal of Universal Design for Learning, or UDL as we know it, is to create expert learners. Learners who are purposeful, motivated, resourceful, knowledgeable, strategic, and goal-orientated. The end game goal is to create students who encompass all those characteristics. We honestly need to be thinking about, how do we engage our students? Engagement is more than just students doing things. It's when the brain is actually engaged, grappling with learning, thinking about their thinking, working through challenging situations. It could be schoolwork, it could be a social relationship at school, whatever.

How do we engage the brain? The why, the effective network. It's so much more than just choices. Because when I talk to educators about Universal Design for Learning, they'll say, oh, I do UDL. And I'm like, great, what do you do? And they're like, I offer choices. So what I'd like to talk to you about right now is when we are thinking about our learners, how do we engage them? We need to first understand the why. So what's happening in the brain? Neuroscience says we have got to get the brain engaged. But here's the dilemma, it's that we know every one of our students comes into our classroom with a story. They come on campus with prior knowledge, experiences, things that have framed their brain, their brain development.

One thing that gets in the way of learning is when the brain is not primed to learn. So when I think about multiple means of engagement and I think about that UDL principle, how do we recruit interest? Minimize threats to that learning environment that are gonna get in the way. If a child is, has some sort of trauma, whether it be a big T trauma, it could be a loss, parents divorcing, catastrophic events, things going on either in the home or outside the home. Those are big T traumas but there's also called small T traumas. And those small T traumas are anxiety. It's a breakup of a partnership. It's a fight with a parent. It's these

everyday situations that actually can throw the brain into what we know, an amygdala hijack.

So when I think about multiple means of engagement, if you're familiar at all with that principle, being able to self-regulate, being able to cope, being able to work with situations and reflect on how am I feeling right now? What's going on inside my brain? What can I do to cope with that? And how can I sustain effort? So when we understand that the brain needs to be online and firing to learn, we need to recognize that some of our kids come in with triggers and that's called the amygdala hijack. It basically is a place in our brain and I'm just gonna show you a quick illustration with my hand, and you're welcome to join me with this. It's a technique that Dr. Dan Siegel actually came up with that shows what happens in the brain when there's an amygdala hijack. And basically what we can do as educators to incorporate social emotional learning throughout the day to get the brain reengaged. And actually equip and empower our students to know some of these coping skills so that they can actively learn.

So it looks like this. So if you take your palm and you put your thumb in the middle, this is called the amygdala, this is the limbic brain, okay? So if we fold your hand over like this this basically is almost the size of your brain. A picture of your brain. And this is what I love to show administrators, students, and teachers, to see this is what's actually happening in your brain when situations, disappointments, trauma happens. So when we actually close the fist of the brain here, this is called the prefrontal cortex, this is where all rational thinking happens, and the knowing, making good choices, and things like that actually happen. And then this part of the brain, in this cortex is actually where the learning happens.

Now, here's the deal. If a child comes in triggered in any sort of way, what Dan Siegel calls it, he calls it the flip the lid. So basically, as a child or a teacher or whomever is starting to feel angry or feel emotions, this prefrontal cortex actually goes offline. And we all know what offline means. When you're on your computer and it totally shuts down, rational thinking no longer can take place.

So what we need to think about doing in our classrooms is how do we get them to then self-regulate? How do we get that prefrontal cortex to actually come online again to where they can actually calm down and actually prime the brain to start learning again? Because when a student is flipped like this, the worst thing we can do is say, what were you thinking? Because they weren't. They're not able to think at that time. The brain right now is in survival mode. It's in a fight, flight or freeze.

So social emotional learning is supported with that UDL framework. But it's something if we want to engage our learners, it's just not about choices, which I'm all about that, strategic choices, but it's also about helping our students being able to self-regulate, understand the coping skills that are gonna actually engage the brain and get it ready to learn.