

## OPENING OUR BOOKS: UNIVERSAL DESIGN AND THE NOVEL STUDY

Kenneth Lloyd Reimer (PhD)  
Faculty of Education, University of Winnipeg, Canada  
[ke.reimer@uwinnipeg.ca](mailto:ke.reimer@uwinnipeg.ca)

Received: 2016-11-21 | Accepted: 2017-05-03 | Published: 2017-05-31

**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 teachers trained in UD will be better equipped to meet the needs of the broadest range of learners through flexible curricular materials and activities.

This comparative case study explores high school English teachers' perceptions of UD aligned teaching practices and their influence on the teaching and learning of the same senior high novel unit: with one class using UD aligned practices and the other class using traditional methods. The findings of this study support the notion that the Universal Design construct may have the potential to develop the necessary talents of teachers to provide a wide range of students with greater access to the novel.

**Keywords:** inclusion, universal design, teachers, novels.

---

### Introduction

With the ever-increasing job demands, high school teachers find it more difficult than ever to compete in the classrooms filled with a wide range of abilities and increased distractions. It is little wonder that a study by the Manitoba Teachers Society (2009) of 15,000 teachers determined that 73% reported that on the job stress negatively impacted their job performance. The main reason for the stress? Teachers stated that differentiating, adapting and modifying instruction was a major cause of work-related pressure.

While the majority of students seamlessly make the transition from middle years to high school, Tilleczek and Ferguson (2007) stated that some students stumble during this event. In fact, this transition is often associated with “dips in academic achievement, dips in self-esteem, and increased social anxiety” (p. 9).

It is unlikely that many high school English teachers would be surprised by these dips above. In addition to these issues, English teachers face the added challenge of promoting and improving student literacy. In order to identify some of the most prevalent challenges, Campbell and Kmiecik (2004) asked over 200 teachers from eight high schools in Chicago the question, “What are the greatest literacy challenges facing high school content area teachers?” The following five challenges were highlighted.

1. Student motivation, interests, and attitudes
2. Lack of critical thinking skills
3. Lack of study skills
4. Many students are struggling readers
5. Lack of understanding key concepts and vocabulary (Campbell & Kmiecik.2004, p.9).

As the list of challenges faced by high school English teachers seems daunting, it is easy to comprehend how some educators may continue to feel “unprepared, unsupported, or unable” to handle all they face on a daily basis (Woolfolk, 1998, p.147). As provinces like Manitoba continue to adopt and promote more inclusive educational standards in schools (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006), these challenges may only increase in complexity.

The adoption of inclusive educational policies and practices is considered crucial in addressing educational equity (Roland, 2008). The rationale for inclusive schools has been around for some time. For example, Stainback and Stainback (1996) noted many years ago that inclusive school communities

provide benefits to all students, reduce the ill effects of segregation, and promote equality for all children. It is little wonder that Manitoba teachers support the philosophy of inclusive education. Still, it can be at times difficult for many teachers to feel successful teaching in classrooms that have a wide range of learning needs. Teachers continuously worry that, as one Canadian educator noted, "A lot of kids' needs are not being met" (Riva, 2016). This can be particularly true as students reach higher grade levels. Inclusion may have social and legal benefits for students of all ages, but academic inclusion for students becomes increasingly difficult to accomplish when they reach high school (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007).

However, many educators believe that a concept known as "Universal Design" could provide an answer to some of the challenges of inclusion by providing access to the general education curriculum to a much larger audience, including students with a wide range of disability and diversity characteristics (McGuire, Scott, & Shaw, 2006). In doing so, Universal Design (UD) may help develop teacher talents, thereby reducing the stress levels of high school teachers challenged with the task of teaching all students in their classrooms. For high school English teachers, perhaps Universal Design can assist them in effectively "opening the books" for all of their students.

### **Universal Design**

Universal Design was originally an architectural term, used to describe the concept that products and environments should be designed to be aesthetically pleasing and usable to the greatest extent possible, by everyone, regardless of age, ability, or status in life (The Center for Universal Design, 2007). Ron Mace, creator of the term Universal Design described it as follows:

"Universal design seeks to encourage attractive, marketable products that are more usable by everyone. It is Design for the built environment and consumer products for a very broad definition of user" (Darzentas & Miesenberger, 2005, p.407). Adelson (2004) agreed, stating, "Universal Design enables everybody not just people with disabilities to navigate,

manipulate, and appreciate our world” (p.30). Thinking beyond obvious disabilities is part of this, too.

Some architectural design examples of UD that we find in everyday life include: (a) installing standard electrical receptacles higher than usual above the floor so they are in easy reach of everyone, (b) selecting wider doors, (c) making level entrances, and (d) installing handles for doors and drawers that require no gripping or twisting to operate (Universal Design, 2007). The idea of UD therefore began with the idea of creating physical environments that assisted independence for individuals who are physically challenged.

### **Universal Design Principles**

To many people, the term Universal Design implies that a “one size fits all” solution is the goal. In fact, the essence of UD is flexibility and the inclusion of alternatives capable of adapting to the wide variety of needs, styles, and preferences (Rose & Meyer, 2000). Although flexibility is valued, Universal Design involves adherence to a set of principles that allow for people with a wide range of abilities to use them. At the Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University, architects, engineers, and designers established the following UD principles.

1. Equitable Use
2. Flexibility in Use
3. Simple and Intuitive
4. Perceptible Information
5. Tolerance for Error
6. Low Physical Effort
7. Size and Space for Approach and Use. (The Center for Universal Design, 2007, p.1).

## Universal Design Process

Burgstahler (2008) suggested that Universal Design is also a process that should adhere to the following steps: (a) identify the application of what is being designed, (b) “define the universe” (i.e., all end-users of the product), (c) involve end-users in the design process, (d) adopt inclusive guidelines or standards, (e) plan for accommodations, (f) train and support personnel, and (g) evaluate outcomes, efficacy, and impact. Based on this list, it is apparent that the process of UD requires careful consideration and the involvement of people with diverse characteristics in all phases of the development, implementation, and evaluation of any application (Burgstahler, 2008). Ostroff (2001) echoed this statement, saying, “We must move to a higher consciousness that the process of designing is not something created by ‘them’ for ‘us’ but something that we accomplish together” (p.2).

## The Potential of Universal Design in Education

As an inclusive philosophy of education has become the model of choice in many provinces across Canada, including Manitoba (Manitoba Education, Citizenship, and Youth, 2006), Universal Design has become much more widely recognized as a promising educational construct, and many educators have suggested that the concept of UD is applicable to the delivery of instruction (Bowe, 2000; Curry, 2003; McGuire, Scott & Shaw, 2006; Udvari-Solner, Villa & Thousand, 2005).

The Province of Manitoba (2006) has highlighted UD in education as the “process of creating systems, environments, materials and devices that are directly and repeatedly usable by people with the widest range of abilities operating within the largest variety of situations”(p.4). Burgstahler (2007) said that UD is applicable to education, and can be related to physical spaces, information technology, instruction, and student services.

With constant concerns about issues such as academic complexity, instructional pace, attitudes of teachers, and preparation for standardized

provincial exams, the secondary level often is considered to be the most challenging of all areas in education to successfully incorporate inclusive practices (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001). If Universal Design could measure up to such a test, its credibility would certainly rise in academic circles.

The purpose of my study (Reimer, 2010) was to investigate the potential of Universal Design in enhancing the abilities and talents of teachers and students in the high school English classroom. Specifically, I wanted to determine if the construct of Universal Design (UD) could help improve student literacy and reduce teacher stress in the high school English classroom. My 2010 study was designed to investigate these questions in a specific educational context. Using qualitative research methods, this comparative case study explored how UD aligned teaching practices influenced the teaching and learning of students in a senior high school English novel study.

## **Methodology**

This case study was conducted between September 2009 and June 2010 following the provincial Grade 11 English Language Arts curriculum (1999) in an urban Manitoba school division. Teachers were interviewed prior to, midway, and after the novel unit was taught. The novel that the two classes were taught was the novel, *Night* (Wiesel, 1982).

After approval from the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) at the University of Manitoba, two Grade 11 English teachers were recruited for this study. In order to recruit these classes, I received permission from the specific school division in which I planned to conduct the research. Potential participants for the study were invited by the principal to participate in the study. All participation was voluntary, and all participants were informed that they could opt out of any part of the study at any time.

The two teacher participants taught English at the same senior high school, and were given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. Teacher A was given the

pseudonym of “Lisa”, and teacher B was given the pseudonym of “Melinda.” Lisa had been teaching English since 1995. Her English classes are at all senior high-grade levels. Lisa holds a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Education. She has never heard of the term Universal Design. Melinda had been teaching for 16 years at the same school in Winnipeg. Melinda holds a Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Education, and a Masters in Education. She had very limited knowledge of Universal Design.

Lisa’s class was designated the control group (traditional methods) and Melinda’s class was designated the experimental (UD) group. For the study, each class was taught during a 4 week period that accounted for approximately 20 instructional hours, in blocks of 5 hours per week. Each teacher recorded the activities in her classroom during the four weeks of the study. The manner in which they were to be taught, however, was to be quite different (see Tables 1 and 2). Lisa taught the unit using traditional methods. For the purposes of the study, we defined “traditional teaching methods” as whatever Lisa normally did with a class during a novel study. Melinda infused UD aligned principles into planning for and teaching the novel study.

### **Melinda’s UD Training**

Prior to either class commencing the novel study unit, I needed to ensure that Lisa

was using traditional methods throughout the course of the novel study, and that Melinda understood and implemented a unit plan based on the Universal Design construct. I asked Lisa to provide me with an outline of the unit plan prior to commencement, and to keep a daily journal record of classroom activities and assignments.

When training Melinda about Universal Design, I first provided an overview of Universal Design as it applied to physical settings and instruction. Second, I reviewed the principals of Universal Design. Third, Melinda and I reviewed

the process of Universal Design. Fourth, I shared several examples of Universal Design units.

### *Universal Design overview*

As a way of providing an overview of Universal Design, I asked Melinda to first complete Updike, Reimer, Romeo, & Young's (2007) "Universal Design in Education" survey in order to learn about the construct of Universal Design, and determine self-perceptions of: (a) the alignment of Melinda's current methods of instruction with the principles of universal design (UD), and (b) areas in the teacher's teaching practices that she believed could be made more compatible with UD. Upon completion of the survey and my interview, I provided Melinda with three 45 minute training sessions that began with me highlighting the construct (The Center for Universal Design, 2007) of Universal Design. These training sessions commenced two weeks prior to the novel study. During this time, we first reviewed and discussed her completed Universal Design survey, and looked for areas of strengths and weaknesses. I then shared a power point presentation with her that highlighted the challenges and benefits of inclusion, and how UD could help overcome these challenges. I explained that it was originally an architectural term, but that educators were attempting to use UD's principles in education, and the process of Universal Design (Burgstahler, 2006).

### *Universal Design principles*

Melinda and I met to review the seven principles of Universal Design (What is Universal Instructional Design, 2002), as a means of reviewing these principals, I interviewed Melinda upon completion of the survey on Universal Design. The purpose of this interview was to obtain Melinda's feedback regarding his or her initial thoughts about Universal Design and her perceptions on how it aligned with her current practices. The interview gave me an idea as to where Melinda was in terms of UD familiarity prior to the novel study. This was a semi-structured interview using the Universal Design survey as a supplement.



### Universal Design process

I reviewed the process of UD (Burgstahler, 2008) with Melinda. Together, we reviewed the UD process and how it relates to Melinda's task. For example, we identified the application of what is being designed as a grade 11 English novel study of the book *Night*. We defined her universe as the grade 11 high school English students. We reviewed the importance of involving her students in the design process of the novel unit, and discussed the importance of offering a variety of activities in her unit. I then asked her the following questions in a semi-structured interview.

1. What type of unit are you designing?
2. Describe the type of students that you are designing the unit for?
3. Will you involve the students in the unit design process? How?
4. Will you adopt inclusive guidelines? Explain.
5. How will you plan for accommodations?
6. What do you feel you need to be appropriately trained in incorporating UD?
7. How are you planning on evaluating outcomes, efficacy, and impact?

### Universal Design examples

Melinda and I reviewed several examples of the Universal Design construct being applied to English Language Arts curriculum. We examined a "web site" that provided a good example of a UD novel study (LaFleche, 2009) for the book, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960). There, we reviewed a number of activities, assessment strategies, and assistive technology tools displayed on the website. I showed her how pre-typed chapter summaries, audiotapes, and chapter-by-chapter vocabulary sheets could benefit her students. Melinda stated that she would look at this website and incorporate similar strategies into her unit.

Melinda and I attempted to meet regularly once the novel study began, but it became difficult to meet in person due to my inability to meet during the school day and her busy schedule in the evenings and weekends. We agreed to continue these UD training sessions over the phone and by email, as we mutually agreed that it was the best way to connect. I continued to send her websites about Universal Design that provided teachers with explanations of UD, and models of Universally Designed units and lessons.

*“That’s good enough!”*

Two weeks into the novel study, I sensed that Melinda was growing tired of the tutorials, and so I asked her if she thought that she had enough learning. She emphatically stated, “I think that’s good enough!” when I asked her if she had enough training from me, and it would be better to cease with these learning activities. Therefore, Melinda and I stopped with the training, after five sessions of training on Universal Design. I had concerns over whether or not I had provided sufficient training, and concluded that it was best not to force the issue. Cawley, Foley, and Miller (2003) noted that even relatively short amounts of teacher training can influence the lesson development of teachers, and so all further training of UD was ceased.

There were implications for my study because the training stopped. From my own research perspective, I had concerns over whether or not sufficient training had occurred. I worried that I risked the assurance of Melinda strictly adhering to UD principles throughout the remainder of her unit.

From the teacher’s professional perspective, however, my inability to control every single aspect in the classroom provided the teacher with some professional “wiggle room.” By not being as prescriptive and allowing Melinda some flexibility to choose classroom activities based on her training, perhaps the model became more functional for her. Although I originally intended to insert a more tightly controlled unit plan, Melinda’s polite rejection of further training in Universal Design inevitably caused me to reflect on the efficacy of learning theories, and how best they can be incorporated into teachers’ practice.

This seems to be a noteworthy area to explore because not every type of theory has to be held to the same standard of infallibility. Although Levy (2010) never specifically referred to Universal Design, he did speak about the differences between event theories and construct theories. Unlike event theories, which Levy (2010) stated could be “verified or proven” (p.11), construct theories provide explanations that are not directly measurable, and can never be proven. Instead, they are “intangible abstractions” (p.11) that should be evaluated for their usefulness, not their correctness. Levy further cautioned that when construct theories are mistaken as fact, there is a tendency to believe they must be “obeyed” and never “violated” (Levy, 2010, p.12). Levy (2010) referred to this error in thinking as the “reification of theory” (p.12). Levy (2010) noted that, “To reify is to invent a concept [or construct], give it a name, and then convince ourselves that such a thing objectively exists in the world” (p.9). Perhaps by allowing Melinda the autonomy to create her own version of Universal Design, Melinda was more willing to “buy in” and test the usefulness of the theory in the manner she sees most applicable to her environment. Melinda seemed to feel more empowered to try and make Universal Design work in her classroom.

Lisa and Melinda were interviewed prior to, midway, and immediately following the novel study. Based on analysis of the teacher interviews and the teachers’ daily teaching logs; it was hoped that further insight could be attained regarding the efficacy of UD teaching practices in a senior high school setting. In particular, I anticipated that the interviews with Lisa and Melinda would generate a wide variety of ideas. I read through these data sources, identified and coded emergent themes and sub-themes, and then assigned interview quotations and teacher log observations to the themes and sub-themes. Finally, I analyzed the emergent themes in order to determine their significance with respect to prior research, implications for practice, and possible future research.

## Results

### First Teacher Interview

During my first interviews with Lisa and Melinda, a wide range of ideas came up for discussion. It appeared that Melinda and Lisa often felt unprepared to handle all of the challenges that students with diverse abilities bring to the classroom. For example, Melinda discussed how teaching four classes per semester limits her ability to provide prompt feedback for her students, saying, "In terms of all the marking, I find that, especially if you're on your four different English courses in that semester, the marking can't be done maybe as quickly as it should be."

Lisa noted the continuous struggle with addressing individual student needs while meeting the demands of the curriculum, saying, "The delivery and pace of the course lessons also requires constant monitoring and reviewing, especially with classes that all have students with a broad range of abilities."

Although each teacher provided unique insight into her methods of instruction. Melinda and Lisa had much in common. First, they began teaching at approximately the same time (Melinda in 1994, Lisa in 1995), have taught English at all high school levels, and both struck me as caring, committed teachers, who were candid about their strengths and weaknesses. Second, Melinda and Lisa both admitted that inclusion was increasingly difficult to accomplish, especially at the high school level. Third, they were both frustrated at times about the barriers that prohibit successful learning in the classroom.

## Midway Interview - An Emerging Shift among the Teachers?

Midway through the novel study unit, Lisa and Melinda were interviewed about their experiences thus far. While both teachers found many challenges within their classrooms, Lisa seemed frustrated by the apathy of many of her students, while Melinda seemed to be excited about how UD was assisting her with the unit. Lisa first reported that the unit was going, "Right along on schedule." She began the unit with the students viewing Schindler's List. Students have had, "Class time every day to read the text and respond to comprehension questions, and yesterday we went over the answers to those...questions."

It was apparent during the midway interview that Lisa was very frustrated with her classroom's attitude and performance. For example, one of Lisa's major sources of frustration centred on her students' apparent lack of motivation in the classroom. For example, she stated, "I find that one of greatest challenges as a teacher is when students do not take any responsibility for their learning. No matter how much time I try to plan class time to give students to do their work, there are still those who mismanage their time and fail to meet even the basic requirements!"

Alternatively, Melinda was much more upbeat when interviewed midway through the novel study. When asked to describe her experiences to this point in incorporating UD-friendly activities, she replied:

*So far I have found [UD principles] very helpful in engaging all of the students. [My English class] is quite a mixed bag when it comes to abilities and behavior, including 8 International students who are really struggling with the language, and 3 students who came out of our Core Focus program last year (a class for students having behaviour, focus and ability difficulties, as she describes it) so I have found that employing universal design activities has not only allowed the students to be more successful, they are able to focus better and enjoy the part of their reader response logs, and then they will write their test!*

Melinda appeared eager to share how she aligned her teaching of the unit with specific UD principles and provided many concrete examples of how the UD principles (The Center for Universal Design, 2007) assisted her in providing a more inclusive classroom environment. For example, when asked about how she was accessible and fair to all parties, Melinda stated:

*I have included things like listening to the novel on a recording while they are reading. This has allowed the novel reading to be more accessible to those who are struggling readers since these students (the struggling ones) would typically not bother to pick up the novel at all. Since we read it together in class, they were all following along, and the intonation of the narrator's voice helped with the comprehension of the text. It was great - the room was dead quiet, and all of the students were reading along the entire time! This would never have happened if I had just said, "Ok- we're going to have a reading period today. Everybody try to get to the end of chapter 2 by the end of the class." That would end up in continual chatting and behaviour problems.*

Melinda tried to have students do a variety of activities from, "Group discussions, writing tasks, group writing tasks, and flip chart presentations" in order to give that flexibility for the varied needs of the students. It was obvious to her that "Some students excel at the writing, whereas others would rather just talk about it out loud and express things orally instead." Still, she seemed to appreciate the individual differences, describing them as, "Great, because this is what it's all about, right? As long as they are demonstrating that they can meet the outcomes, who cares how they do it!"

## **Novel Study Unit Daily Activities**

The novel study continued in both classes for approximately another two weeks after the midway interview. At the conclusion of the novel study, both teachers provided me with summaries of their unit plans. As I reviewed the daily activities of the classrooms, I noticed that Melinda's classes were much more varied in terms of activities. She incorporated movies, television interviews, representative diagrams, small and large group discussions, and deskwork.

Lisa chose to spend a much more significant amount of time devoted to individual deskwork, correcting of questions and answers, and teacher lectures. In short, it appeared that Melinda's class was provided with a much more colourful and eclectic mix of learning opportunities that may appeal to the different types of learners in her classroom. Based on her more dynamic instructional methods, Melinda appeared more talented as a teacher.

Table 1. Lisa's Daily Unit Plan for "Night". Source: author.

Week	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week 1	Gates- MacGinitie Pre-Test Viewed "Schindler's List"	Viewed "Schindler's List"	Concluded "Schindler's List" "Night" book handed out , ch.1 read aloud	Distributed and read intro notes (vocabulary, character list, historical timeline, map)  All Chapter questions distributed to students (so can be done in case any kids get sick. Students work individually on questions	Individual work period for students to complete assigned discussion questions.
Week 2	Individual work period for students to complete vocabulary questions, some students ready to begin chapter questions	Individual work period: reading ahead, chapter questions, and/or vocabulary	Individual work period: reading ahead, chapter questions, and/or vocabulary	Individual work period: reading ahead, chapter questions, and/or vocabulary	Many students had still not completed first chapter set of discussion questions, and/or vocabulary, (so had today) to finish their work
Week 3	Reviewed timeline and class hand-out sheets about "Night." Begin correcting vocabulary words	Reviewed and corrected answers for discussion questions for pp. 1-20. Read excerpts from novel as it pertains to questions and allows for class discussion about the text.	Continued to correct answers for discussion question from pp.2143. Discussed the word 'night' as symbol for the novel	Corrected chapter questions for chapters 3-9. Class discussion as we corrected answers for chapter.  Questions and allows for class discussion about text. Distributed questions	Set date for test of novel unit study. Students work individually on reader response logs. Reviewed concepts of simile, metaphor, and irony. Wrote vocabulary definitions on chalkboard. Students work on simile and metaphor hand-out sheets. Begin activity sheet for Irony. Review study checklist for novel unit test.
Week 4	Night unit test	Gates Post-test.			



Table 2. Melinda's Daily Unit Plan for "Night". Source: author.

Week	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week 1	Gates- MacGinitie  Pre-test	Brainstorm on meaning of holocaust Present and describe holocaust timeline  Create bio poem Simile/metaphor review and sheet (for style in the novel)	Gates test	Hitler bio (think, pair share) Read aloud his bio  Read Chapter 1	"Survivors of the Holocaust" video
Week 2	Oprah article - interview with Elie Weisel  Read Ch.2	On-line pictures of Elie touring  concentration camps and real photos of the camps and people at the end of the war Vocabulary used in Night - group search and share with class (chart paper, etc.) Read ch. 3.	Hitler character map  Read ch. 4	Irony in Night - explain irony - sheet - do first together, rest in pairs.  Listen to ch. 5 on CD ROM  <i>(noticing at this point that some aren't reading the novel, so I made the choice to get the CD so that we could listen and follow along - worked great - everyone on task and following).</i>	review ch. 1-5  Listen to ch. 6
Week 3	Reflection (2 prompts on overhead) on Night thus far Listen to ch. 7,8,9	Study guide questions ch.6&7 Simile of myself sheet	Study guide questions  8&9	Stereotype - discuss, group sheets on scenarios	Themes - group discussion, sheet
Week 4	Tone and symbol in Night - review meaning of terms, sheets	Characterization - Elie, Elie's father - behavior, appearance, and dialogue	Review  Night Vocab (test prep)	Go over test requirements Start Schindler's List movie	Schindler's List conclusion
Week 5	No classes	Schindler's and review for test	Night Test	Gates Post Test	

## Final Teacher Interviews - Different States of Energy and Emerging Talents

At the end of the novel units, I conducted post-novel study interviews with Melinda and Lisa. The original purpose of these interviews was to compare and contrast methods of instruction between the two teachers. As the interviews progressed, I discovered that Lisa and Melinda wanted to talk more about how they thought the novel study went, whether or not their students were successful, and their perspectives on why success was or was not achieved. After reviewing the transcripts of interviews, Melinda's comments seemed much more positive than Lisa's responses. I think that Melinda believed she was much more successful than Lisa did at the conclusion of her novel study.

*I thought it worked out really well! I mean, these are things that we should be thinking about all the time, anyway, and I really try to implement this type of planning and thinking in all of my classes, but I have to say that with the novel study, this is really easy to do. The great thing about a novel study is it can be so wide open, you know, so the range of activities and lessons that you can do around it is really big, which allows all of those learners in your class a chance to get at the learning tasks by whichever way works for them!*

Interestingly, both teachers stated that a great deal of effort was necessary on their part to be successful in the classroom. Lisa stated:

*I cannot be ever complacent with these students as they have many needs and are very demanding. I found their classroom behaviour to be very challenging and their misbehaviour would affect their potential to be successful if and when particular students would be chronically disruptive during class lessons, class discussions, and class work periods.*

Universal Design training did not seem to make Melinda believe that she was immune to expending great amounts of energy in order to teach her grade 11 class. During the third interview, Melinda expressed this reality:

*It is actually quite a bit of effort to teach this range of students! Some just "get it" every time, some need a bit more nudging, and some need the constant help in grasping any concept. Combine that with kids always coming in late, kids away for whatever reasons, kids acting up, constantly interrupting instruction, phone calls you need to make for late work, missing work, missing kids!.*

Throughout the novel study, both teachers admitted that teaching high school English for students with a wide range of abilities was a very challenging endeavour which required a great deal of energy on their part. The biggest difference, however, seemed to lie with how Lisa and Melinda spent their energy.

Lisa seemed frustrated at the end of the novel study. She stated that even though she has, "Put forth a tremendous amount of energy and effort" into her classroom instruction", she was astounded by, "The students' lack of effort or commitment to learning and taking responsibility for their own learning." It seemed as if Lisa shifted the blame for her classroom's apparent lack of success on her students' unwillingness to take personal responsibility for their learning.

Overall, Melinda's responses indicated that she felt successful teaching her class. Melinda was concerned that teaching English took up a lot of her personal and professional energy, but believed that Universal Design made her a more talented and proficient educator:

*Nowadays, it takes more effort than it did, even 10 years ago, but if that's what it takes, then that's what it takes. Now (teachers) got a very busy, full plate, when you're constantly thinking, 'OK, how can I get that to them a better way, how am I going to assess this so that they can all have a fair go of it?' I would say...minimum amount of effort? No, not a chance. We see kids coming into grade 9 here with a grade 2 and 3 reading level! So now we mix them up with kids*

*who are university bound, and we have a challenge on our hands! That's where this universal design thing comes in. It's just a necessity and a reality of life in this job now. Anyone who isn't teaching this way now, is probably only hitting home to 10-15% of their students, because, at least in this school, you just can't "blanket teach" anymore, and still think you're doing a good job. And the way I see it, most of us get into this job, because we like kids and want to help them get to where they need to be for whatever their goal is. It's a caring profession, right? So let's care and do what it takes to make that happen.*

It is possible that Melinda's positive response and willingness to take on the challenges that teaching high school English resulted in part because of a long-standing personal philosophy of education that may differ from Lisa's philosophy. However, Melinda's responses throughout the final interview supported the notion that Universal Design may help teachers increase their talents and abilities to perform their duties in inclusive environments. Melinda's comments supported the idea that the construct of Universal Design, if presented to the teacher and permitted the professional discretion to infuse it into instruction, can help teachers feel empowered to overcome the challenges.

## Conclusion

Based on this case study and the themes that were generated, a number of other studies could be conducted and prove insightful. For example, research is needed on teachers coping with the diversity of academic skill levels in senior high school, with particular emphasis on English Language Arts. More studies are required to examine teacher stress, workload, and job satisfaction and frustration. Further research into reducing teacher stress load through UD would be interesting. Further, it would be interesting to conduct a case study where a teacher taught a novel study unit once using traditional methods, and then taught it again after being trained in Universal Design.

It might also be helpful to conduct a study similar to this one, but using a qualitative design with some quantitative data collected within it. This approach may ensure richer and more trustworthy qualitative data. In addition, rather than looking specifically at academic outcomes as success indicators, it might be valuable to conduct a study of UD looking for other outcomes such as engagement between students and their teachers, engagement between students and their peers, and/or changes in the self-concepts of the students. It might also be useful to conduct a long-term, whole school study on the efficacy of UD. A study comparing and contrasting a newer, more universally designed high school with an older school with retrofitted technology may be intriguing. Finally, it may be beneficial to conduct further studies that explore the evolutionary nature of the development of UD in education.

Although being a Manitoba high school English teacher these days can be a challenging profession, my study supports the idea that the Universal Design construct may provide a useful theoretical framework for teachers to creatively and independently develop practical ways to promote and improve student literacy in their classrooms. By enhancing their talents, teachers trained in UD may spend less time and energy blaming the less successful students in their classrooms, and spend more time and energy universally designing their instructional practices to meet the needs of all students.

Melinda's largely positive responses concerning the challenges of teaching this high school novel study, her willingness to implement strategies related to UD, and her more diverse and imaginative lesson planning provided the evidence required to support such a claim, or at least to warrant further research in this area. Melinda's overall responses and more eclectic novel unit plan seemed to support McGuire, Scott, & Shaw's (2006) assertion that Universal Design principles and processes may help teachers provide access to the general education curriculum to students with a wide range of diversity characteristics. The manner in which the UD construct is shared with teachers is also crucial. It seemed as though brief bursts of agreed upon training, combined with the allowance of teacher autonomy to creatively

incorporate it into their instruction, is a promising model to explore. In short, the construct theory of Universal Design combined with some independence given to the teacher may help high school English teachers creatively open the book for more of their students.

## References

- [1] Adelson, R. (2004, October). Universal design: Opening every door. *Inside MS*, 22(4), 30-34. Retrieved September 16, 2008, from CINAHL database.
- [2] Bowe, F. (2000). *Universal design in education: Teaching non-traditional students*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- [3] Burgstahler, S. (2008). *Universal design in education: Process, principles and applications*. Retrieved Nov. 18/08 from <http://www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/Programs/ud.html>
- [4] Burgstahler, S. (2007). *Above from universal design in education: Principles and applications*. Retrieved Oct 29/07 from [http://www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/Academics/ud\\_edu.html](http://www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/Academics/ud_edu.html)
- [5] Burgstahler, S. (2006). *Equal access: Universal design of student services*. Retrieved November 2, 2007 from [http://www.calstate.edu/accessibility/downloads/Equal\\_Access\\_Student\\_Services.pdf](http://www.calstate.edu/accessibility/downloads/Equal_Access_Student_Services.pdf)
- [6] Campbell, M, & Kmiecik, M. (2004). The greatest literacy challenges facing contemporary high school teachers: Implications for secondary teacher preparation. *Reading Horizons*, 45(1), 2-25.
- [7] Cawley, J., Foley, T., & Miller, J. (2003). Science and students with mild disabilities. *Intervention in School & Clinic*, 38(3), 160-171.
- [8] Curry, C. (2003). Universal design: Accessibility for all learners. *Educational Leadership*, October, 55-60.
- [9] Darzentas, J. & Miesenberger, K. (2005). Design for all in information technology: A universal concern". In Anderson, K.V., Debenham, J., & Wagner, R. (Eds.). (2005). *Lecture Notes in Computer Science* (pp.406-420). Berlin: Springer.
- [10] Downing, J., & Peckham-Hardin, K. (2007, Spring2007). Inclusive education: What makes it a good education for students with moderate to

Reimer, K. (2017). Opening our books: Universal Design and the novel study. *Journal of Accessibility and Design for All*, 7(1), 76-98. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17411/jacces.v7i1.123>

- severe disabilities? Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 32(1), 16-30.
- [11] Lafleche, M. (2009). Universal design for learning. Retrieved October 15, 2009 from <http://tkamforall.pbworks.com/Universal-Design-for-Learning>.
- [12] Lee, H. (1960). To kill a mockingbird. Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott.
- [13] Levy, D. (2010). Tools of critical thinking: Metathoughts for psychology (2nd ed). Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc.
- [14] Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth (2006). Appropriate Education Programming in Manitoba: Standards for Student Services. Winnipeg, MB: Author.
- [15] Manitoba Teacher's Society (2009). MTS task force on teacher workload: Final report. Retrieved from [http://www.mbteach.org/library/archives/issues/workload/workload\\_report.pdf](http://www.mbteach.org/library/archives/issues/workload/workload_report.pdf)
- [16] Mastropieri, M., & Scruggs, T.E. (2001). Promoting inclusion in secondary classrooms. Learning Disability Quarterly, 24(4), 265-274.
- [17] McGuire, J.M., Scott, S., & Shaw, S. (2006). Universal design and its applications in educational environments. Remedial and Special Education, 27(3), 166-175.
- [18] Ostroff, E. (2001). Preparing and Recruiting Designers for an Inclusive Society. Plenary Address, Inclusion By Design. Montreal, Canada June 2, 2001.
- [19] Reimer, K. (2010) Universal Design in Education: The Missing Link? University of Manitoba: MSPACE Thesis.
- [20] Riva, N. (2016). 'A lot of kids' needs are not being met': Lots of labels, lack of resources for students with special needs. CBC News. Retrieved April 10, 2017 from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/special-ed-iep-support>.
- [21] Roland, K.A. (2008). Educating for inclusion: Community building through mentorship and citizenship. The Journal of Educational Thought, 42(1), 53-67.
- [22] Rose, D., & Meyer, A., (2000). Universal design for learning: Associate editor column. Journal of Special Education Technology, 15,(1).

- [23] Senior 3 English Language Arts: Manitoba Curriculum Framework of Outcomes (1999). Manitoba Education and Training. Winnipeg.
- [24] Stainback, W.C., & Stainback, S.B. (Eds.). (1996). *Controversial Issues Confronting Special Education - Divergent Perspectives* (2nd Edition). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- [25] The Center of Universal Design (2007). Retrieved October 29, 2007 from [http://www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/about\\_ud/udprinciplestext.htm](http://www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/about_ud/udprinciplestext.htm)
- [26] Tilleczek, K., & Ferguson, B. (2007). *Transitions and pathways from elementary to secondary schools: A Review of selected literature*. Ontario Ministry of Education.
- [27] Udvari-Solner, A., Villa, R. & Thousand, J. (2005). Access to the general education curriculum for all: The universal design process. In R. Villa & J. Thousand (Eds.) *Creating an Inclusive School* (2nd ed., pp. 134-156). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- [28] Universal Design (2007). Retrieved November 3, 2007 from <http://www.accessiblesociety.org/topics/universaldesign/>
- [29] Updike, M., Reimer, K., Romeo, L., & Young, L. (2007). *Universal Design in Education Survey (Field Test Version)*. Unpublished course assignment, University of Manitoba. Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.
- [30] Villa, R., & Thousand, J. (2003). Making inclusive education work. *Educational Leadership*, 61, (October), 19-23.
- [31] What is Universal Instructional Design? (2002) Retrieved October 30, 2007 from <http://www.tss.uoguelph.ca/projects/uid/uidintro.html> Wiesel, E. (1982). *Night*. New York. Hill and Wang.
- [32] Woolfolk, A.E. (1998). *Educational Psychology* (7th ed.). Needham Heights, MA. Allyn & Bacon.



©© Journal of Accessibility and Design for All, 2017 ([www.jacces.org](http://www.jacces.org))



This work is licensed under an Attribution-Non Commercial 4.0 International Creative Commons License. Readers are allowed to read, download, copy, redistribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of the articles, or use them for any other lawful purpose, giving appropriated credit. It must not be used for commercial purposes. To see the complete license contents, please visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>.

JACCES is committed to providing accessible publication to all, regardless of technology or ability. Present document grants strong accessibility since it applies to WCAG 2.0 and PDF/UA recommendations. Evaluation tool used has been Adobe Acrobat® Accessibility Checker. If you encounter problems accessing content of this document, you can contact us at [jacces@catac.upc.edu](mailto:jacces@catac.upc.edu).