

How UDL Feels: Through the Experience of One Student

While attending a recent conference, I was struck by the difference in presentation style among 2 different session presenters. Two sessions come to mind: a universally-designed session and a traditional “sit and get” session. In the first session, which coincidentally was about Universal Design for Learning (UDL), the presenters actually modelled the UDL framework, offering options for engagement, representation, and action and expression. In the second session, the presenter delivered information in the form of a lecture. The following is my own personal reflection, as an adult with ADHD, on how I felt in each session.

UDL Session
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I felt like I fit in
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I felt like my ideas were valid and important • I felt like an equal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I had multiple options to express my understanding • I chose to use visual representations because that is my preferred method
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was engaged for the entire (3 hour) session
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I didn't want to take a break because I didn't want to miss anything
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I felt confident, like I had mastered the content and was ready for a more rigorous challenge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After the session I could have explained exactly what I learned and what the session was about

Lecture Session
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I felt lost, like everyone else knew what was going on except me
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I felt like my opinion and ideas didn't count • I felt like a kid sitting at the adult table at Thanksgiving
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I had one option to express my understanding- speaking into the microphone • I chose not to speak, it felt too formal, like my questions/comments would be silly
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After about 10 minutes of (the 45 minute) lecture I tuned out and checked my email
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I felt trapped, and after the first 10 minutes I wanted to get up and walk out
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I felt dumb, like I should understand, but I didn't want to learn any more, I just wanted to leave
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After the session I couldn't have explained what I learned- even if I had the PowerPoint slides