

LEADERSHIP COURSE

Jesus and the **INCLUSION MODEL**

Practical suggestions for the inclusion of all children and teenagers in the church

MODULE 2



BOOK DETAILS

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CONTENTS

Introduction	4
1. What is Universal Design for Learning - UDL?	7
1.1 How to work with Universal Design for Learning?	10
1.2 Accessibility and the elimination of barriers	12
2. From Theory to Practice	15
3. Final Considerations	23
4. References.....	25



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the new module of the Leadership Course, prepared by the Children's Ministries of the South American Division. The theme of inclusion is very important, and you might be eager to receive practical tips and suggestions on how to handle the Sabbath School classroom to meet the needs of children with disabilities. Because it is such a comprehensive topic, it is necessary to take it step by step. Practical tips without a theoretical foundation might not yield the expected results.

Therefore, understanding the biblical stance on disability and inclusion (module 1) and concepts like Universal Design for Learning will enrich and make your work with the children of the church more rewarding.

Meeting the human diversity in their specific needs is a great challenge. According to the United Nations - UN, the global population reached the mark of 8 billion people in November 2022. Physically, each human being is unique, not only by their fingerprints but also due to epigenetic factors, DNA sequence, dental arch, iris, and retina. When it comes to behavioral aspects, peculiarities are unveiled, and the possibilities are countless.



The psalmist David expresses his conviction of being unique as he poetically recounts how God created him:

"For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee." (Psalm 139:13-18, KJV)

In the educational context, faced with the wealth of unique details that make each individual a world of incredible particularities, it is limiting and frustrating to pretend that a single path leads everyone to success in learning.





On the other hand, lack of knowledge and unpreparedness to address the specific individual needs of students can lead to embracing the traditional model that operates automatically and inflexibly, prioritizing content over the learner.

However, when planning actions for only one type of student without considering physical, social, cultural, interest, and skill differences, among others, many will be excluded at some point in the process.

In this sense, Universal Design for Learning - UDL, aims to address this diversity through a simple proposal based on 3 fundamental pillars in the learning process that takes into account the heterogeneity of the student group, enhancing the learning of each individual.



1. WHAT IS UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING - UDL?

Classrooms, both in secular regular schools and in the context of Sabbath School in the Seventh-day Adventist Church - SDA, are becoming increasingly diverse with linguistic, economic, cognitive differences, and a host of many others that could be mentioned. In the past, curriculum content used in regular schools was designed based on an ideal and pre-established student standard, which neuroscience and teaching experience prove does not exist. Each student is unique in their style and path to learning, just like a fingerprint. This individual arrives in the classroom with their own interests, knowledge, skills, and challenges.

Thus, the curriculum needs to be designed from the outset to accommodate this diversity, as when planning is geared towards a single student profile, many students are left behind. UDL is a curriculum approach that reduces or eliminates barriers and enhances the learning of all students. With UDL, activities are designed to be accessible and understandable to everyone. (Rose, 2015)

Universal Design for Learning encompasses more than a methodology; it is a framework based on cognitive neuroscience for



designing learning experiences that work for a wide spectrum of learners. The goal is to ensure that all students succeed in learning development through a fully flexible approach that allows things to be demonstrated in various ways. (Cast, 2016, B)

Did you know that the concept of Universal Design was conceived in the year 1985 in the United States by the architect Ron Mace? The idea brought about a significant change to architecture and design, both for buildings and products. According to Mace, Universal Design, when applied to a project, facilitates the creation of environments and products that can be used by the largest number of people to the greatest extent of their individualities. (São Paulo, 2010)

In this context, within the realm of urban mobility, when addressing sidewalk lowering and constructing access ramps, for instance, individuals using wheelchairs will benefit just as much as those with strollers, bicycles, or rollerblades.

Dr. Rose, Chief Scientist of the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) for the field of cognition and learning, commented that initially, their focus was on students with low performance who had some form of disability. Over time, they shifted their focus because they realized that when



they were in a classroom, the environment itself was deficient by not being properly designed to ensure that all children learned.

Similarly, the school curriculum itself had deficiencies. It was understood, then, that the work of UDL was to eliminate deficiencies in the environment and the curriculum so that more students would achieve success. (Rose, 2015)

When something is designed with certain people and their specific needs in mind, many other individuals benefit. In the educational context, UDL borrows this idea and applies it to curriculum planning by selecting flexible learning goals, methods, materials, and assessment approaches.

This initiative began with the CAST, operating in the United States since 1984, and involves the efforts of learning scientists, instructional designers, literacy experts, policy analysts, graphic designers, user experience designers, software engineers, and administrative staff.





CAST's initial idea was to enhance the learning experience of students with learning difficulties through computer technology. In 1986, CAST and Harvard University conducted a week-long training program for educators on computer usage to address the needs of students with disabilities. Subsequently, the event became an annual occurrence, shifting its focus to Universal Design for Learning.

1.1 HOW TO WORK WITH UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING?

By no means does it imply designing a separate activity for each student. The focus of UDL is on planning educational actions for the entire diverse group of people, not just for students with disabilities or specific needs. Thus, the emphasis is not on adapting or reducing the curriculum, but on ensuring access for all. UDL aims to address the heterogeneity of the student body, with the teacher serving as a mediator in the learning process. Correctly applying

UDL requires prior reflection on teaching and learning processes and a break from old paradigms. (Leme, 2021)

Examining the term Universal Design for Learning, we see that the word Design implies a search for multiple forms or paths that should be constructed in the teaching/learning process. The word Universal indicates a curriculum that can be used and understood by everyone, considering that each person carries a baggage of past experiences, skills, needs, and interests. Regarding the word Learning, it should be understood that it does not refer to a single thing. According to neuroscience, our brain has 3 major networks for learning:

Presentation: the “what” of learning.

Action/Expression: the “how” of learning.

Engagement: the “why” of learning.

Therefore, students require knowledge or information, application and skill development, and engagement to learn. The curriculum proposal needs to assist in making this happen by encompassing these three major areas indicated by neuroscience.

As each child is unique, a single teaching format cannot accommodate them all. Therefore, how can a curriculum plan be created that encompasses diverse students?



This is where the term Design comes into play. When something is designed or planned to cater to any type of student, whether with or without disabilities, it will certainly work better for everyone.

The teacher should begin their planning by asking themselves what goal they want the children to achieve with a certain content. What do they want the students to know or do? Once a specific objective is formulated for a particular topic, the next question should be: What barriers in the classroom could hinder or complicate the child's achievement of this objective? In a practical sense, when considering content, the teacher should remove barriers that could limit some children, thereby making learning more accessible to everyone.

1.2 ACCESSIBILITY AND THE ELIMINATION OF BARRIERS

Maybe even before considering the content itself, the first thing to think about is whether the physical space of the environment as a whole provides the basic accessibility conditions for the child to reach the Sabbath School room with autonomy, safety, and comfort. This includes being able to use the restroom facilities and water fountains in the area. Families and the children themselves should be consulted on the matter.



In this sense, similar to what happens in secular regular schools, for the learning process to be accessible through UDL within the Sabbath School classroom, the church as a whole must apply the concept of Universal Design as a cross-cutting approach throughout its structural building and in its actions, whether pedagogical, religious, or social. In other words, the child, the target audience of Sabbath School classes, should have access and inclusion ensured in all spaces and moments experienced in the church, and not just in the context of Sabbath School.

According to Sasaki (2009), there are 6 major correlated dimensions for the concept of accessibility:

- Physical or architectural: aims to eliminate physical barriers in urban spaces, buildings, and public transportation, as well as in all common use areas;



- Communicational: aims to break down communication barriers in various forms, including the promotion and use of Sign Language (used by some deaf individuals) and Braille system for reading and writing (used by some blind or visually impaired individuals);
- Methodological: aims to eliminate barriers that hinder the acquisition of knowledge and information, including the use of Universal Design for Learning, which seeks to flexibilize teaching methods and study techniques;
- Instrumental: encourages the use of different tools to facilitate learning, such as communication boards (used by nonverbal individuals, such as some people with autism) and the abacus, an object used by visually impaired children to learn mathematics;
- Programmatic: aims to eliminate nonsensical rules and regulations that still create barriers to accessibility and inclusion of people with disabilities;
- Attitudinal: aims to reduce or eliminate prejudices (ableism, which is the term for various forms of prejudice against people with disabilities), stigmas, and socially assigned stereotypes for people with disabilities.



2. FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

In the educational context, to eliminate barriers from the environment, methods, and materials, the 3 principles of UDL are used:

1. Presentation

Multiple ways to present content (what to learn?):

Offer various means of representation for a given content. Present the content and information in different ways and provide diverse support. Use graphics and animations, highlight key features, tap into prior knowledge, and reinforce vocabulary for children to acquire the taught knowledge. For example, when telling a story, allow children to handle objects related to the proposed context; emphasize vocabulary by naming the main characters and essential objects for story comprehension; create a panel with images representing the characters or objects of the story; play the audio narration of the sto-





ry while constructing a board together with objects or figures from the narrative; show a video about the story. Describe each step of the activity and the outcome of each stage. Choose to represent the story by fully exploring all five senses.

2. Action and Expression

Multiple ways of acting and expressing (how to learn?)

Provide various means for action and expression. Allow students to showcase their understanding and provide models, feedback, and support for their diverse levels of comprehension. Example: enabling children to express what they have learned through drawings, music, text, personal anecdotes related to the topic, and encouraging students to work both individually and in groups. Having communication boards available in the classroom is very helpful; ask children to respond to questions or express themselves by pointing to or touching the corresponding image. These boards can cover various topics, including containing images that represent Bible stories that can be conveyed non-verbally.

3. Engagement

Multiple ways to promote engagement (why learn?).

Offer various means of engagement. What stimulates one person to learn may not motivate others. The teacher should provide options to foster students' interest and autonomy. They need to take risks and learn from mistakes; when they are enthusiastic about learning, they will persevere through challenges. The teacher, as a facilitator of the process, should always keep in mind and make clear the goal set at the beginning of the journey. People generally engage in a project when they understand the reasons, identify with the presented rationale, and feel part of the plan—in other words, when the proposed content makes sense to them.

It is important that the Sabbath School moment follows a routine of activities, and all students are familiar with the sequence of events. This can be displayed on the wall, as a kind of sensory agenda, at a suitable height for visual and tactile reach of the child. At the



same time, the elements of this board should be of a size that facilitates reading/observation, with good contrast between background and foreground colors, and can be made in relief (using materials like EVA, for example) to allow for identification through touch.

Universal Design for Learning is recommended to serve students with disabilities or learning difficulties. However, it is proven that when used by the entire group, without distinction, it enhances the performance of all.

The focus of UDL is to ensure that those students who, for some reason, have been marginalized in the teaching-learning process are being reached. Those who don't fit into the standard plan that has never worked because there is no standard student. All those students who make an effort and always finish with below-average results, foreign students facing the challenge of learning a second language, children and adolescents with disabilities, as well as those students with high abilities/giftedness. People who have been marginalized by this illusory standard curriculum, often boring, senseless, and not offering appropriate challenges.

The concept of Universal Design goes beyond just adapting a building or object to be accessible and inclusive. It is about thinking differently from the planning stage of the building or material so that everyone can use it. It is about finding ways to facilitate Bible learning for all, understanding that changes made for children with dis-





abilities can also greatly benefit the development and learning of all children. It is a responsibility for the whole church! Therefore, it is necessary to know the steps to follow in order to make the church function for everyone.

The First Step

A first step is to vote in the local church board the Adventist Possibilities Ministry. This ministry was included in the Church Manual in 2022 and operates with the principle that everyone is valuable, talented, and needed by God and His church. To learn more and get specific materials, visit the website: <https://www.possibilityministries.org/>

The Second Step

Conduct an assessment of the overall and specific conditions of the church regarding any barriers that may exist, making the church inaccessible to people with disabilities. The Adventist Possibility

Ministries has prepared a questionnaire to assist in this task. Access it on the website: <https://www.possibilityministries.org/resources/general-resources/accessibility-questionnaire/>

The Third Step

Analyze the data provided by the assessment, identify what needs to be modified, adapted, or reformed. Then, plan ways to accomplish everything necessary to have a church that complies with the current accessibility standards in the country and follows the principles of Universal Design.

Remember: it is essential to seek assistance from an expert in the field for the planning and implementation of the necessary changes!

Some actions to be considered, which will benefit all children! (Pletsch, 2021)

- Learn more about the children and how you can provide tools to better meet their needs;
- Set up the rooms, preferably on the ground floor;
- Provide ramps, access elevators, handrails, grab bars, and directional tactile flooring;
- Use clips to secure printed material on supports (table, clipboard, etc.);



- Provide wide doors for wheelchair passage;
 - Ensure the classroom floor is not slippery;
 - Install lower height water fountains;
 - When necessary, offer pencil grips, pens, and other objects for thicker grips.
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- When planning activities, prioritize flexible objectives as they make it easier for children to handle. When explaining activities, ensure everyone can understand expectations. Use simple words, drawings, simulate actions etc.;
 - When conversing with a wheelchair user or if the child cannot stand, sit down while talking. It is uncomfortable for anyone to look up while conversing;
 - Remove physical obstacles hindering the child's free movement in the environment. If immediate removal is not possible, help the child navigate around them;





- Harness technology to your advantage. Depending on the need, explore and use apps to facilitate teaching;
- Use “clean” typefaces (those that aid clear understanding) at a size that allows easy reading;
- Offer diverse activities, considering the broad diversity of students;
- Provide options for children to receive stimuli through different senses, such as vision, hearing, taste, smell, and touch, to comprehend the same content.

Important: when preparing various Sabbath School activities, following your class’s auxiliary manual instructions is already a first step toward UDL. The Sabbath School curriculum emphasizes that each student learns differently and varying activities according to learning styles is necessary. However, you can go beyond this by following the guidelines provided in this course.

3. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is known that the realities differ regarding the structure of Sabbath School for children and adolescents in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. There are large churches with many members and a solid ministry infrastructure, as well as small churches with few members and, therefore, limited human and sometimes material resources.

The intention behind introducing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is not to burden Sabbath School teachers further, but to demonstrate that it is possible to meet the specific needs of all children using a simple model based on human learning brain configurations. Support materials for these approaches can be created by teachers themselves without significant financial investments.

Moreover, the entire church should be engaged in implementing the concept of Universal Design in all its departments, physical structure, events, and member attitudes, providing support to Sabbath School teachers of the younger students. The Possibility Ministries exist to assist local churches in understanding matters related to accessibility and inclusion of individuals with disabilities in their activities.



This second module of the Leadership Course aimed to help teachers understand that a child should always be seen in their entirety and not solely based on a single characteristic. When the focus is on eliminating barriers that limit or often prevent access to what is rightfully theirs, the deficiency of the environment becomes evident. This material does not aim to exhaust the topic; much study and research are still needed to measure results and enhance knowledge on the topics covered, especially within the context of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

An inclusive church requires the participation and involvement of all its members and leaders. Thus, ensuring, promoting, and overseeing accessibility in Adventist institutions is the responsibility of every member and is part of the mission to bring the good news of salvation to all people. In turn, UDL enables the growth of all involved in the process: teachers, students, and their families. Its proposal aims to enhance the quality of teaching and learning for all children, with and without disabilities.

Dear leader, remember that knowledge is fundamental for promoting success in your ministry. May God bless you in this endeavor!

More resources, please visit our website: Faithfinder.com or scan the QR Code



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For more information about the Adventist Ministry of Possibilities, visit:

<https://www.possibilityministries.org/>

YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@AdventistPossibilityMinistries>

