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A Critical Review of Katz, J. (2013) The three-block model of universal design for learning (UDL): Engaging students in inclusive education. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 36, 153-194

This article discusses a research study in which the universal design for learning (UDL) pedagogy was implemented within classroom settings to determine the levels of engagement of students involving this method in classrooms from K-12 in rural and urban Manitoba (Katz, 2013). This UDL method is an “approach to instruction that promotes access, participation and progress in general education curriculum for all learners” (Katz, 2013). Katz first defines inclusion by dividing it down into two subtypes, academic and social, which involves full involvement in activities and curriculum in the regular classroom and the equal opportunity to be accepted into the learning community, respectively (2013). She then continues to explain her study, including method, findings, and limitations to her research (Katz, 2013).

While reading this article, I found myself reflecting on previous courses in my education in which we have learned about this model of engagement. I also found it very interesting when the article stated that there is a relationship between engagement and inclusion in that when a child is disengaged, they are actually experiencing a source of inequality because their needs are not being met (Katz, 2013). This is a connection I have not made explicitly yet because realistically whenever I think about inclusion, I am thinking about ways to include children with disabilities. When you take this statement into consideration, as well as the UDL method in general, it makes you realize that inclusion is beyond just students who have disabilities. When you examine the three-block model of UDL in Appendix A of the article, there is no mention of a student having a disability in order to be apart of the model (Katz, 2013). I believe this speaks

to how educators should be treating their classes, focusing on how to best support everyone rather than just those students labeled with a disability.

As my background is in early childhood studies, I feel that while reading this article I was surprised that the classes that implemented the UDL model required them to create inquiry-based projects (Katz, 2013). This is because throughout my education I have learned the importance of these types of projects, particularly with young children and would expect that educators would already be doing these things in their class, as that is how I was taught to educate. Engaging children through their interests is one of the main tools we were taught in order to lesson plan for students. Regardless of their abilities, every child has an interest in something and will therefore be motivated to learn, an educator just needs to tap into this potential.

I appreciate that the UDL model involves many of the aspects I have been taught, such as inquiry-based projects, as I feel as though I am on the right track in terms of the type of educator I will be. By being apart of this study, this also means that important components such as this has been proven to increase engagement and will therefore be spread and used by more educators as it is proven to be effective.

When the article discusses the limitations of the study, I value that Katz identifies the need for future research in regards to teachers who may be less motivated to implement this model (Katz, 2013). As I stated earlier, I have been educated about the importance of many of the methods used in the UDL model, but that does not mean that all educators have. Many are unfamiliar with these techniques or have for years taught children independently, instead of allowing them to work collaboratively and in groups because that is how it used to always be done. That is not to say that there is not some value to how these teachers are educating, as I was one of those students who was always taught this way. Although, it would be interesting to see if

over the years as more older teachers retire, if attitudes towards inclusive education and UDL will change due to the absence of these elder teachers or if some way the research will finally be enough to prove the importance of inclusion.

## References

- Katz, J. (2013) The three-block model of universal design for learning (UDL): Engaging students in inclusive education. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 36, 153-194