

Cultivating Empathy through a Universal Design for Learning Perspective

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Abstract

In this session, two instructors teaching in different fields (Biology and Education) will discuss how their use of a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach has created the conditions for increased empathy in their classrooms. The UDL framework, which emphasizes multiple modes of representation, action and expression, and engagement, is designed to give students multiple pathways to achieve learning outcomes. Several studies have shown that UDL practices increase student perceptions of instructor's approachability and empathy (Orr and Hammig 2009). UDL research, reviewed by Orr and Hammig (2009), suggest that faculty members need to plan proactively to incorporate empathy in their teaching. From this, we see the cultivation of empathy as a practice that we embody as instructors, and that we then foster in students. However, social and emotional learning isn't just about instructor approachability. We also need to encourage our students to become more empathetic. Katz (2012) and Partridge (2018) both identify UDL as a practice that can help encourage empathy through intentionally teaching for social and emotional learning. By recognizing that students benefit from choice and opportunities to be engaged in their own learning journey, we demonstrate empathy and create flexible learning environments that promote the development of empathy in our students.

References

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