

Jeff Gandell's UDL Portfolio

Fall 2017, 603-102-MQ: Contemporary American Fiction

Why I joined the UDL @ Dawson Community

- With work I've done with WID @ Dawson, and my own class observations, the following has become evident:
 - Everyone learns in different ways
 - The structure of school does not jive with all learning styles
 - I give students mixed messages:
 - I want them to feel free to express themselves,
but
 - I'm also asking their work to fit into a rigid template of writing/expression



The problem

- Students come into English classes at wildly varying levels of reading and writing proficiency
 - First, second, and third-language students are all given the same evaluations
 - Students' grades are often based on previously acquired skills and proficiencies



The problem

- Establishing a rigid level of proficiency in reading/writing that all students must reach in order to pass the class is not fair
 - If the level is too high, several students will not have a fair chance of succeeding
 - If it's too low, several students will be bored



UDL moment: **Fairness**

- What is more fair?
 - Having a one-size-must-fit-all approach to instructional design,
or
 - allowing for options that are tailored to individual learning and personality styles?

“Twenty-first-century instruction will likely need to alter instructional practices in order to place students in the role of Goldilocks – they try multiple options to determine which option is “just right” for ensuring their performance is acceptable to meet high standards. Principles of fairness indicate that equity is achieved when every student receives what he or she needs” (Welch, 2000).

The problem

- How do I establish goals and grading criteria that feel genuinely attainable, challenging, and worthwhile to all students, regardless of the level of English they're entering the class with?



The plan

- Establish a structured system of **student self-reflection**.
- Put these self-reflections **at the forefront** of the work we're doing in the class.



From *Universal Design for Learning: Theory and Practice*

“What researchers call ‘self-regulation’ is the ability to set motivating goals; to sustain effort toward meeting those goals; and to monitor the balance between internal resources and external demands, seeking help or adjusting one’s own expectations and strategies as needed” (Meyer et al, 52).

“In order to develop better capacity for self-regulation, learners need to learn to monitor what they bring to a learning environment in terms of what they know and need to know, how to plan for ways they may use to get to the learning goals, and to monitor their emotions and reactivity carefully and accurately. These highest level skills are the mark of an expert learner; someone who does not know everything, but knows how to learn everything” (Meyer et al, 75).

Self-reflections: Learning Objectives

- Have students create **goals** for themselves
- And evaluate if they meet those **goals**

Universal Design for Learning Guidelines

Provide Multiple Means of
Action & Expression
Strategic, goal-directed learners

Provide options for executive functions

- + Guide appropriate goal-setting
- + Support planning and strategy development
- + Enhance capacity for monitoring progress

Self-reflection: Learning Objectives

Universal Design for Learning Guidelines

- Create **self-directed** learners
- **Motivate** students to do their best work

Provide Multiple Means of **Engagement**

Purposeful, motivated learners

Provide options for self-regulation

- + Promote expectations and beliefs that optimize motivation
- + Facilitate personal coping skills and strategies
- + Develop self-assessment and reflection

Self-reflection: Learning Objectives

Universal Design for Learning Guidelines

- Get students to consider how **emotion** and **attitude** impact results

“Our expectations about what we perceive literally determine what we do perceive”
(Meyer et al, 39).

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Purposeful, motivated learners

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Self-reflection: Learning Objectives

Universal Design for Learning Guidelines

Provide Multiple Means of
Engagement
Purposeful, motivated learners

Provide options for sustaining effort and persistence

- + Heighten salience of goals and objectives
- + Vary demands and resources to optimize challenge
- + Foster collaboration and community
- + Increase mastery-oriented feedback

Provide options for recruiting interest

- + Optimize individual choice and autonomy
- + Optimize relevance, value, and authenticity
- + Minimize threats and distractions

- Instructor can get to know **students' self-identified strengths and weaknesses** quickly and efficiently

Self-Assessment #1 (at beginning of semester)

- How do you feel about your own writing skills?
- What do you hope to get out of this class? What are your goals for this class (besides getting a good grade)?
- Judging by the course syllabus and what Jeff has explained so far, how do you feel about the work you're going to be asked to complete? Are you excited, scared, nervous, intimidated, inspired, (or anything else) by the challenges of this class? Explain your answer.
- Broadly speaking, what do you think the point of a College English class is? If you feel that there's no real point (that's okay!), then what should the point be? In other words, if you feel that English class is not really useful, then what can you do to make it more useful to yourself?

Self-Assessment #1: Student Responses

- “I just want to tell you that I am very shy and I do have some difficulties when it comes to expressing myself in front of the class which means that I usually do not participate a lot but I am always listening and I always take a lot of notes.”
- I am feeling anxious and scared because there seems to be a lot of interactions that need to be done within the class and I have generalized anxiety and talking in front of the class or within a large group of people is something that gives me anxiety attacks.”
- “I feel nervous because reading an English article is not as comfortable as reading a Chinese article. With my limited vocabulary, I have to check dictionary several times when I read a story.

Provide Multiple Means of
Engagement
Purposeful, motivated learners

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Self-Assessment #1: Student Responses

- “just by reading stories you are able to discover new perspectives of life from the different characters present something you cannot do in a Physics class. **Not only an English class allows you to learn more about life through novels and short stories it also allows you to improve your language. Honestly, I think that refining your language is one of the most important things that you can do as a student or as a person** in general because the way someone addresses himself can say a lot about that person and being able to express yourself using good vocabulary is pleasing to everyone around you. Finally, in my opinion, it is important to always find a reason and a point in everything you do because if you do not see the point in doing so then you will have no motivation and that can result in you not being able to complete the task.”

Provide options for recruiting interest

- + Optimize individual choice and autonomy
- + Optimize relevance, value, and authenticity
- + Minimize threats and distractions

Self-Assessment #2: Before first major assignment

1. **Is anything unclear to you from the instructions?** Write any questions that you have. Cite any parts of the instructions that are unclear.
2. **How do you feel about this assignment?** Are you excited, terrified, nervous, confident, etc.? Why do you think you feel this way?
3. **What are some aspects of previous English essays that teachers have praised you for?**
4. **What are some aspects of previous English essays that teachers have said you need improvement on?**
5. **What are your goals for this assignment?** (besides getting a good grade). You can look at the grading criteria on the instructions and discuss any one of these aspects you'd like to especially focus on for this assignment. Or if you have your own ideas that don't fit into these grading criteria, feel free to elaborate on those.
6. **What grade do you anticipate that you will get on the final draft of your short story review?** **Don't include this answer in your response.** Write down a number grade that you think you'll get. Write it somewhere private. Hang onto it, either in your own personal journal, a note-taking app, a post it note in your drawer, etc. Do not share this grade with your teacher.

Self-assessment #2: student responses

- “Are we analyzing the literary elements in the story **with the objective of criticizing them or simply to inform the audience?** Is it recommended to apply the themes and subjects discovered in the story to real life situations, or rather to remain within the context of the story? Will we get points deducted for not using a somewhat casual tone?”
- “I’m not a huge fan of the grading criteria outlined for this assignment. **With such a rigid and specific criteria, how is one supposed to innovate and redefine a review?** This, in my opinion, will inspire students to write mundane reviews barely worth reading. It will be an exercise of grammatical and syntax capacity, but not much else.”
- I modified assignment instructions based on student feedback.

“Monitoring progress and making adjustments are a normal part of our work as both learners and teachers—and a natural way to grow”
(Meyer et al, 56).

Self-assessment #2: student responses

- “Although it may be somewhat foreign to me, by writing in a casual manner, I will have a chance to express my voice and tone throughout my writing. This makes it much more personal, and honestly a lot harder. I’m genuinely excited to see the direction in which this review goes, and the discoveries I may make along the way.”
- “I am excited to write a great review that perfectly captures what I think are the best elements of the story, and I think our site will provide a good compilation of reviews. I know eventually I am going to feel overwhelmed by the amount I’ll have to write, but I’ve written a lot of long essays so I know it’s doable.”

“Expert learners can set difficult goals for themselves and muster the effort to sustain their effort to achieve those goals even when conditions frustrate engagement and achievement” (Meyer et al, 61).

Self-assessment #3: after first major assignment was completed.

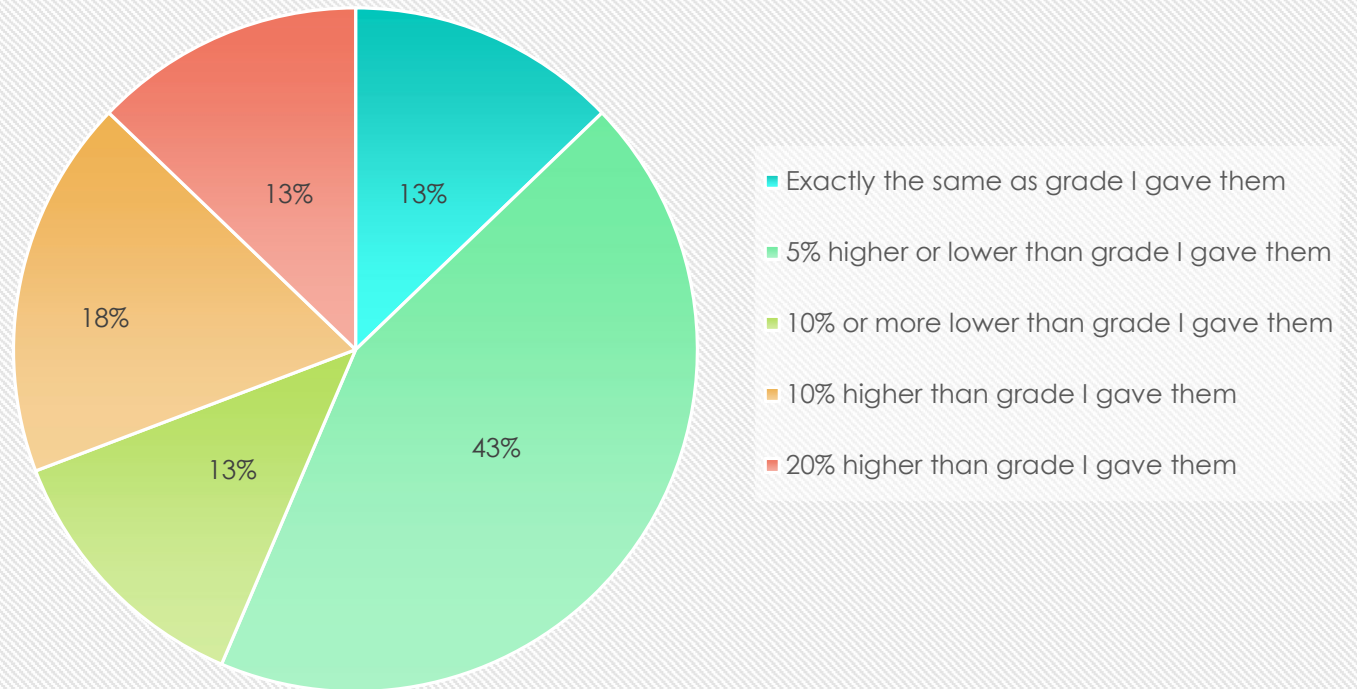
- First, give yourself a grade in each of the categories on the rubric, and add it up for a total out of 15. Look carefully at the criteria for each category before giving yourself a grade. Copy and paste the rubric onto your document. (Grading rubric listed below this)
- Next, write a paragraph where you give your essay general feedback. This can be similar in tone to the feedback I've been giving you on your work. You can list the essay's strengths. What do you think you do really well on this essay? You can also list the essay's weaknesses. What areas were less successful than you'd hoped? You could also look back at the goals you set out in self-assessment #2. To what degree did you meet these goals? This feedback paragraph will serve as a kind of justification for your grade.

Results

56% of students gave themselves a grade within 5% of the grade I gave them

30% of students gave themselves a grade 10% or higher than grade I gave them

Students' self-assessed grade



Self-assessment #3: student responses

- “I did a good job in terms of digging deep beneath the surface of citations. I looked up all the word that I thought I could have a lot of meat on them and by doing that, this is how I realize that there is enough stuff for me to do a psychological analysis of this short story. However, I think that I still have some difficulties in terms of writing a thesis statement, I always felt like mine is either too vague or too precise. My thesis statement could have been better.”
- “The feedback from my peers encouraged me to go for a more obvious theme because that’s what my draft ended up leaning towards. This wasn’t a terrible decision, because I was able to explain this theme much better and make a few interesting points, but I feel that it is too shallow and not really a discovery of anything new beyond the surface of the story. I think that the theme of Wallace being childish and his actions being driven by his emotions is something anyone could pick up on in the first read. I do think I expanded on the emotional complexity of Wallace’s character, but I don’t know if that’s enough to make this a really good essay, which is why I gave myself a mark in the low 80s.”

Provide options for executive functions

- + Guide appropriate goal-setting
- + Support planning and strategy development
- + Enhance capacity for monitoring progress

Self-assessment #4

- Asking for questions/feedback/ideas about second major project. Similar to Self-assessment #2.



Self-assessment #5: Reflections on progress throughout semester

- Do you think you improved as a writer and/or reader and/or learner this semester? If so, how? If not, why not?
- What one writing lesson will you take from this class? Why do you think that lesson stuck with you?
- What's one reading or analytical lesson you will take from this class? Why do you think this lesson will stick with you?
- What do you think the most important thing you learned in this class is? Why?
- What's one thing you think you'll remember from this class in ten years? Why?
- What's something that's still unclear to you about a principle of writing and/or reading that we discussed in class?
- Which piece that we read do you think will stick with you? What's one piece that affected you that you will remember? Why?
- Any other comments you have about your own learning process throughout the semester.

Self-assessment #5: student responses

- “The class environment and teaching allowed me to dig deep into my thoughts and be okay with them. It’s alright to write a certain way, it’s alright to think a certain way, it’s alright to create a certain way. **What I will take away from this class is the fact that liberty of thought and expression is cherished and valued.**”
- “Through this class, **I have become more confident** of that voice and the difference ways I can project it. To me, that is the most important thing I learned from this class. I think it’s so important and memorable for me because, **I’ve never felt so encouraged** to express myself like this, especially not on an academic level.”
- “I realized that **the skills I have in essay writing can be applied to all sorts of different mediums** and that is **a lesson that I hope to take with me** in my future academic and professional endeavours.”

A new course goal emerges

- Instead of
 - a rigid level of proficiency in reading/writing that all students must reach in order to pass the class
- The goal becomes to allow each student to leave the class with
 - confidence in their abilities
 - awareness of their strengths
 - a feeling of accomplishment, joy, and self-love

Unexpected benefits of self-assessments

- I got really **useful feedback** about assignment instructions. I was able to refine and tweak assignments to make instructions simpler and more understandable
- Students were remarkably **honest** and fair in their assessment of their own work

Unexpected benefits of self-assessments

- Students wrote a lot: the informal, reflective nature of the writing allowed for genuineness and flow
- Students ended up producing some of their best writing in these assessments.
 - Writing style and grammar were usually excellent
 - The depth of ideas and analytical complexity often surpassed that of formal, analytical assignments

Works Cited

- Meyer, A., Rose, D.H., & Gordon, D. (2014) *Universal design for learning: Theory and practice*, Wakefield MA: CAST
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