Lindsey Almeida

Professor Daly

Assistive Technology EDTC 620 55

August 5, 2014

Many barriers exist in education preventing students from realizing their full potential and holding them back from succeeding in school. The National Center on Universal Design for Learning, brings these barriers to light, and is a great resource to provide facts, advocacy, and ways to implement a Universal Design for Learning so every student has an equal opportunity to learn. But, barriers still exist in school environments to this day. I have come across a few barriers in the district that I work in; they range from the special education classes, to the school’s physical access and environment, and the technology provided for student use.

A barrier that I have come across in my school district every year is having special education students main streamed into electives. The reason I believe that this is a barrier is because those teachers, including myself, who teach electives, are not certified to teach special education. When I first began to teach, one of the schools I was in was a K-8 building, which included two self-contained special education classes. I was intimidated in the beginning, since I had no formal training in special education, and was not confident in my teaching skills. I was worried that I would not be able to give the students the learning environment they needed. It was a learning curve, and to be honest, every year it still is. I know that there is so much more to learn, in the form of formal training, but as the years go by, I learn more and more, all being taught by my students.

Like most school districts, students are placed in the elementary schools by where they live. Physical access in a school is extremely important. A few of the elementary schools in the district, in which I teach in, do not have elevators. So when a disabled student needs access to an elevator, the district has to make sure that the student is going to be attending of the few schools that do have elevator access. One issue is if a student severely hurts himself or herself and needs to be in a wheel chair for an extended amount of time. The student now has to be transferred to a different school, possibly not near their home. Not only will this be an inconvenience for the student and parents, but also for the teachers. Even though all teachers are teaching the same curriculum, each teacher has their own style and their own pace. Even if the student was transferred only for a few weeks, it is likely that she is either ahead or worse, behind in the curriculum.

Two years ago, our school district implemented iPads into our classrooms. Every high school teacher and student received one, with the idea that this will change the way students looked at education. The tablets are a great resource in the classroom since the information is right at the student’s fingertips, or students can bring up a drawing reference with out wasting paper. As an educator, the iPad is a great help, a quick way to access information or a simple way to connect to the smart board to show a PowerPoint. But, on the downside, what many teachers have begun to realize, is how distracting they really are. Students are hiding behind their iPads, not participating in class discussions, or instead of working on their art project, they decide to play games. We rely on the students to bring their iPads to class so we can incorporate the iPad technology into our lesson plans, but most of the time students either forget it at home or in their car, or its broken to the point that they can no longer use it. And those student’s who do bring it to class, do not use the iPad for what it is supposed to be used for.

Because art is such a visual subject, I try my best to incorporate all the different type of learners when I am introducing a project or explaining a technique. In the beginning of each school year, I take a few hours to read any 504 plans or I.E.P.’s that my students have, to familiarize myself with any disabilities my students may have so I can incorporate different teaching styles into my lessons to help the student succeed in my class. I also make sure that I have an open line of communication with both the student and their caseworker, so I have the support need if I have any questions or concerns. Rarely is there written homework in art class, but if there is I take that into consideration, along with the mid-term and final exam. I make sure to go back and re-read the 504 plans and I.E.P’s so I know how I should modify the exams. If a student is having a hard time on an artwork, I will give the student extra attention, sit with them and see if we can figure out the problem together, or if they need extra time, I will give it to them. I strive to give my students a safe learning environment, where they can be comfortable and happy while exploring art.

WORK CITED:

Edyburn, Dave. "Would You Recognize Universal Design For Learning If You Saw It? Ten Propositions for New Directions for the Second Decade of UDL." *Learning Disability Quarterly* 33.Winter 2010 (2010): 33-41. 1 Jan. 2010. Web. 1 Aug. 2014.

Burgstahler, Sheryl. "Universal Design of Instruction." *Asccess Stem*. 1 Jan. 2002. Web. 1 Aug. 2014. <http://www.washington.edu/doit/Stem/ud.html>.

About UDL." *Cast*. Web. 1 Aug. 2014. <http://www.cast.org/udl/index.html>.

National Center on Universal Design for learning. “National UDL Task Force.” *National Center on Universal Design for learning.* Feb. 12, 2010. PowerPoint Presentation.