

Educational Strategies

This online resource uses a number of pedagogical strategies, most of them taken from the realm of inclusive pedagogy. Mainly, I've been concerned with Universal Design for Learning, created by CAST, but I've also used a number of other educational strategies. These various strategies are aimed at all sorts of different groups, from P-12 to graduate students, to reflect the wide range of people who are being invited to participate in the project. I'm glad I did so, considering that so far, the people who have submitted their art range in age from 5 to 77, are from nine states across the U.S., and come from a wide variety of faith traditions (Catholic, Protestant, Conservative Jewish, atheist, and agnostic, to name a few). That variety suits the definition of "diverse learners" just about as well as any group could. Of course, my aim is to make it even more diverse as I share the completed project with more people.

I would be remiss to not begin with my specific use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The basic gist of UDL is "multiple modes of representation, engagement, and expression,"¹ and the very concept of "multiple modes" is baked into the most basic premise of my project, visible even in the site's tagline: "a multisensory, multimodal approach to Hildegard of Bingen and Julian of Norwich." By engaging multiple senses (at the moment, activities on the site deal with sight, hearing, and touch), the project provides ample opportunity for multiple means of engagement and expression. One can engage with different senses and modes as well as present their own work in these different senses and modes. In this way, a site user can participate in the project in the way that feels best for them, or even is most interesting to them at

¹ CAST, "Universal Design for Learning Guidelines."

the moment. Different people can produce a song, digital art, or a three-dimensional diorama all for the same activity and still be doing the activity "right."

This "multisensory" aspect, though, is also borne out of a desire to provide multiple means of representation. Of course, I provide multiple means of representation in the traditional "accessibility" sense. A Deaf /HoH user can read the transcript of the guided meditation and look at the images provided for the plainchant activity and still participate fully in the activity, and a visually impaired user can make good use of the fact that the site is entirely screen-reader compatible and provides image descriptions throughout. However, I wanted to go beyond mere "accessibility," and decided to design activities that cater to different specific senses, so that someone can participate in the mode that works best for them. I created activities with specific sense engagement in mind, knowing that I wanted people to be able to listen in some activities, look in others, and move their bodies in more still. I even made sure to provide suggestions for how to change levels of sensory engagement in each activity, where it's applicable, by telling participants explicitly that it is acceptable and even welcomed that they can modify each activity in any way they need. This way, a more auditory activity can be modified to be more visual, and vice versa.

The entire point of UDL is that accommodation does not ever need to be requested; rather, the entire resource and the work created by the learners is accessible from the start. Yet I am fully aware that there most likely will be modes of access I need to add as the project grows. To this end, I've created a feedback form where people can tell me what they think, and I hope that learners will use it to tell me what needs improvement for greater access (and I actively encourage its use at the end of each activity). Additionally, I already am aware that the site does not actually use "every sense," as the site title promises, as smell and taste are missing. Such

activities are at the present outside of the scope of the original six activities I have developed. Yet my hope is to add at least one more activity in the future that deals with these two senses (and this activity is already in the nascent stages of development). I hope that by creating and posting this additional activity, I'll be able to reach and accommodate even more people, and thus truly begin to fulfil the mission of UDL.

Despite all my work with UDL, I wanted to also make sure that my pedagogy was inclusive in other ways. I deliberately require very few, if any, special materials or equipment in any of my activities (the one exception to this being the cosmic embroidery activity, for which I put a note in the body of the activity noting that I'll be more than happy to mail some of the requisite materials to anyone who might have a hard time obtaining them). This way, I can cater to those who do not have the disposable income to purchase materials, those who have a hard time getting to a store, or even those who just want to use what's on hand. It's very important to me that these activities are accessible regardless of income and environment, because if there's a financial or social barrier to my work then it's not truly accessible.

In the interest of accessibility, I've also worked to make sure that my pedagogy is trauma-informed. Trauma-informed pedagogy aims to identify and examine sources and impacts of trauma in learning environments and ensuring that your pedagogy both is accessible to learners with trauma and is not a source of trauma itself.² I am aware that I'm working with a sensitive topic, religion, and that religion (and specifically western Christianity, with which my project deals heavily) is a not-uncommon source of trauma. To this end, I made the decision to deliberately cater my work to people of all faith traditions. My background in inter-religious and interfaith work has been useful here, but above all I've benefitted from using a wide range of

² Imad, "Leveraging the Neuroscience of Now"

"testers" for my project. I have specifically worked with individuals who are not Christian to ensure that my project still works for them along the way. Many of the preliminary testers for each activity were not from the same faith as Julian and Hildegard, and that was done deliberately; I specifically asked Jewish people, nonreligious people, and people with religious trauma in particular to look at each activity in its early stages. Their work was so appreciated, and their input was invaluable (and their art, visible in the gallery, is gorgeous). I am aware that my Christian background, both religious and cultural, gives me a blind spot where I might create or trigger trauma, and I worked actively to make sure that my methods, content, and language were inclusive and sensitive without dampening the very real religious conviction that Julian and Hildegard felt and expressed in their works.

My final source of pedagogical focus came from a desire to include learning design frameworks that were aimed specifically at younger learners. As previously mentioned, it was important to me that my work appeal to learners of all ages and that the work is also both accessible and still actively educational to these younger learners. Even though this project is a Masters' thesis, it still needed to work for those in the P-12 age range, so I drew on the principles outlined in the *Parallel Curriculum*.³ While the model is aimed at K-12 gifted students in a classroom setting, its basic principles are still useful here, particularly its three parallel curriculums: the curriculums of connection, practice, and identity. Most relevant here are the latter two. The curriculum of practice asks the learner to become a practitioner of their field of study, engaging in the work directly in the real world and viewing the world through the lens of their discipline. The curriculum of identity encourages learners to put themselves and their experiences and talents directly into the discipline and understand how they specifically could be

³ Tomlinson et al., *The Parallel Curriculum: A Design to Develop Learner Potential and Challenge Advanced Learners*.

an asset to the discipline at hand. All three curriculums, though, ask the learner to enmesh their own identity and interests with the discipline, to make the research they are doing personal, thereby investing themselves deeper in the content. When I ask participants to engage in the long tradition of spirituality in art, they become practitioners, and when I allow learners the space to choose what sense and mode works best for them, I encourage their personal identity to affect what the output of my project looks like. As my project is non-curricular, these connections are not fully aligned with the Parallel Curriculum, but I would be remiss not to mention its influence, especially when I considered how to engage grade-school-aged learners.

It's also worth mentioning that I've used the ever-useful Bloom's Taxonomy to guide me as I create my activities. Of course, parts of my project engage all different parts of the Bloom's pyramid (remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating)⁴ at different points, but I knew from the outset that I wanted to engage mostly at the highest levels of Bloom's. By doing so, I can ensure that my learners are more fully engaged with the material, and that they understand it in a much more meaningful. Depth of knowledge was very important to me here. Obviously, a great deal of the work takes place in "creating," as that's the point of the whole project, but there's also a great deal of application (seeing an example and then applying it to your own art-making process) and evaluation (being asked to evaluate what you think about a certain medieval thinker's art or views as you create) as well as all the other levels. While I didn't intentionally label specific parts of my project as falling within specific levels of Bloom's, I wanted to still have this terminology on hand as I worked, and it was very helpful as a reference point to understand what I was asking learners to do and how they would better learn the content by doing those things.

⁴ Anderson & Krathwohl, *A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy*

This project, then, draws from a large number of curriculum design sources, both within established frameworks and guidelines like UDL and Parallel Curriculum and within general educational best practices such as inclusive and trauma-informed pedagogy. In this way, I tried to make sure that the activities on the site are educational, accessible, and require learners to engage beyond the basic levels of recalling knowledge; I want my project to move towards the learner becoming part of the tradition they're learning about, instead of just reading about it.

Bibliography

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