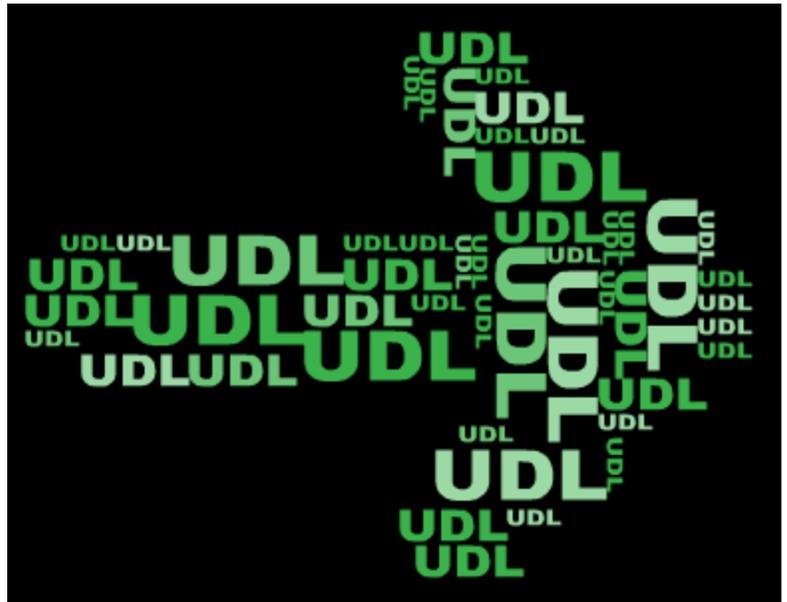# A.T.TIPSCAST Episode #101 – UDL NEXT

Welcome to the first episode of Season 6 of the A.T.TIPScast, exploring and investigating the implementation of assistive technology in public schools. I'm your host, Chris Bugaj. This is Episode #101, recorded on 9/4/12. Welcome back everyone!

By now, if you're in education, you've probably heard of the term Universal Design for Learning. You've probably learned what it means and have at least begun to think about what it means to you and your students. But now that you know about UDL, what comes next? Where do you go once you've learned the theory?

A.T.TIP #288 is embedded into something I'm calling UDL NEXT.

What's is UDL *NEXT?* It isn't a new version for UDL, it's just what's coming next in the implementation phase.

When an educator has learned about UDL and has begun to plan lessons using this framework, they begin to see the world

differently. They might begin to think that their understanding of UDL is complete. They don't need training any more in the ways of the force. They have become a UDL Jedi.

So, what do they do next? What comes now, once you know about UDL? What is UDL NEXT?

To me, the answer is tools and strategies. There is a never ending stream of tools and strategies to be discovered. Each time you hear about a new strategy or learn about a new tool, you can ask yourself the following questions,

"Will this tool help me to represent information in a way to match the needs of different learners?"

"Which types of students or which specific students will find this tool engaging?"

And "How can I use this tool to help students express what they know?"

It might be helpful to think of it as putting on a pair of UDL glasses. Before, you were seeing the world all fuzzy-like but, because you had seen the world that way your whole life, you didn't know things were blurry. Then, you hear about this awesome invention called glasses, and you try them on and WOW everything becomes sharper and more defined. This is what the world really looks like!

Now, with your glasses on, when you hear about new tools and strategies, you view them through the lens of UDL.

Moreover, school systems can use these UDL glasses while looking at EVERY decision that needs to be made regarding items that will impact instruction. For instance, if the district is considering spending money on technology tools they have to make a choice. There is only so much money available so, to help decide if a tool is a good purchase, they should ask themselves the following questions:

"Which tools allow educators the greatest ability to provide options?"

"Which tools will help educators represent information in a way to match the needs of different learners?"

"Can educators use these tools to help engage students?"

"Can educators use this tool to help students express what they know?"

Let's go through an example with our UDL glasses on. Okay everyone, put your UDL glasses on. Here's a new tool that you've just heard about. I'm calling it A.T.TIP #288 and its SpiderScribe.net, which is a web-based graphic organizing tool. Like most web-based graphic organizers, it comes with a wide array of free options and additional options you can utilize if you pay for a premium membership. Focusing only on the free, Spiderscribe.net allows a user to create an unlimited number of

public maps, maintain 3 private maps, and provides 3MBs worth of file and image space for uploading purposes to be placed in the mind map you're creating. It allows you to add cells of text, files, images, geographic maps, and calendar items.

So, with our UDL glasses on, we explore this tool asking ourselves the UDL Next questions.

Can this tool provide me with another way to represent information to students? In the case of SpiderScribe.net, it provides the educator with a new way to represent information visually, laying out maps in different arrays as necessary to make the content understandable. Because you can upload audio files and embed hyperlinks, I can allow students the option to listen to content if they so choose. The tool provides me with options for different ways to represent information.

Does SpiderScribe.net provide students with another option for how to express themselves? Again, I think the answer is yes. The tool allows students to arrange elements on a page, create new elements using a variety of file formats, and to share the work with others. For these reasons, it provides students with options for different ways to express what they know.

Does SpiderScribe.net provide me with a way to engage students and who would find this tool engaging? Once again, for me, that answer is yes. The tool allows users to create rich, visually appealing mind maps with the ability to embed a

variety of media types. In this way, it can be used to engage learners who like to move things around and manipulate elements on a screen, who like to type in short, predefined areas as opposed to a blank white canvas or space, who like to embed or utilize multimedia components, and who like to collaborate with others.

The tool doesn't force or necessitate any of these factors. Rather, its flexible, to meet the needs of many types of learners allowing the educator and students a variety of options.

For any tool being considered, if the answer is yes to all of these questions, then the tool or strategy in question might be a good one to use. That's not to say, depending on the tools being considered there wouldn't be other criteria you'd consider, but by viewing the specifics of a tool through UDL glasses, we develop a good start at how to examine the effectiveness of a tool or strategy.

So, what do your UDL glasses look like? Do they have bright stars on the frames? Do they have the letters UDL on them, like a set of New Years Glasses? Do they have deedly boppers sticking off the sides?

Mine? Well, mine look like Keanu Reeves' from the Matrix.

Speaking of the Matrix, maybe it helps to think of it like taking the blue pill in the Matrix. Once you've swallowed the pill, you

can't ever "unsee" the world as it truly exists. Once you know about UDL, you can't ever see teaching in another way.

But, what does Neo do then? Neo sets off to change the world...or to save it.

If you know about UDL, if you've swallowed the blue pill, then that should be your mission too. Set off to change the world. Set off to spread the word. Go off and do more good beyond your walls. What do Luke and Leia do after they defeat the Empire? Is the story over or is there more good they can do?

Okay, I'm mixing movies there, but you get the idea...you know about UDL, you have a process to evaluate tools and strategies at your disposal, you have a way to evaluate new tools and strategies that you hear about, you have a process for how to view every decision in education, and now you have a responsibility to tell others.

I created a spiderscribe web example featuring some of the elements mentioned in this episode. You can check it out over at http://bit.ly/udlnextspiderscribe.

You'll notice in that map that I mention that Beth Poss and I will be presenting a 2 day pre-conference down at ATIA in Orlando, Florida on January 29th and January 30th called "Mission Possible: Proliferating a Culture of Universal Design For Learning" Registration is now open so you can read all

about it and sign up over at http://bit.ly/missionatia. Remember, you can sign up for each day separately, but we'd love to have you there for both days.

Also, I wanted to let you know that I'll be the facilitator for a 6 week, online course about Universal Design for Learning available from The International Society for Technology in Education. If you're interested in learning more about UDL or if you know anyone interested in learning more about UDL, the information about the course can be found at http://bit.ly/udlcourse.

As luck would have it, as I was putting this episode together Paul Hamilton, an educator working in British Columbia, wrote me on Twitter to let me know about his new UDL resource called, well, it's called "udlresource" which you can find over at, well, udlresource.com. The site is extremely well organized with information on UDL and engaging tools that can be used to represent information in a variety of ways and options for students to express what they know. In fact, it's sooo good I'm calling it A.T.TIP #289. I'll have a link to it, along with everything else mentioned in this episode, over at the blog http://attipscast.com.

Finally, in an episode titled UDL Next, I thought it might be fitting to explain what's next for me. When I first started the A.T.TIPSCAST back in 2007 I had quite a bit more time than I do

now. Specifically, my family was younger, smaller and slept way more frequently. It was relatively easy to slam out some work on an A.T.TIPSCAST episode during weekend naptimes and one or two nights a week while the rest of the household slumbered. Now, my family is growing up a bit and weekend naptimes are quickly fading away. On many days we attempt to convert naptime into quiet time where everyone goes off to do their own things, but as I look at my 7 yo son staring at me asking me to play with him I can't shake the feeling that these moments won't be coming back. I want to soak them up while they're here.

On the other hand, I still thoroughly enjoy putting the A.T.TIPSCAST together. By episode three three of the A.T.TIPSCAST it occurred to me that the world needed a fun and engaging way to learn about technology to help students, with or without disabilities. I've tried to include fictional stories, audio dramas, sound effects, analogies, and some, really, really, really hokey, corndogish jokes because my hope was those methods would be engaging ways to make things stick.

The goal was to get you to say, "Oh, cool! A new A.T.TIPSCAST episode came out! I wonder what nonsense Chris has cooked up today?" – You know…fun while learning…for adults too! Just because you're a professional doesn't mean you can't have fun, right?

All of that makes doing the A.T.TIPSCAST a lot of fun, and I can't see myself giving it up anytime soon…But I can see myself slowing down. I planned to have 20 episodes per season of the A.T.TIPSCAST and I hit that mark each year…some seasons even had a few special episodes thrown in! But with my kids growing older, I don't think I'll be able to maintain that pace into future seasons. I might have to cut back a touch.

So, what's next for me? More time with my wife and family, just as it should be. Until next time, may all your interventions be inclusive and may all your strategies by supportive.