

TOWARD A PEDAGOGY OF INCLUSION

Universal Design for Capilano University

A practical and reflective practice guide for faculty

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UNIVERSAL DESIGN

WHAT IS UNIVERSAL DESIGN ?

Universal Design (UD) is a framework that supports the preparation and design of teaching and learning processes and environments.

The framework will invite faculty of Capilano University to be more flexible and ready for the diversity of abilities and backgrounds of students on our campuses. Universal Design, through a core set of principles, can address contemporary issues such as

diversity, social justice, inclusive practices, accessibility, diversability, community, place, and pedagogical relationship.

The term Universal Design was coined in the 1970s by architect Ron Mace at the University of North Carolina. Mace, a wheelchair user, defined Universal Design as the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design” (Center for Applied Special Technology, 2011a). The framework’s

popularity grew in the 90’s, aligning with the will to create environments accessible to all people. The work of that period concluded that cities, schools, and other environments should be designed with the following aspects in mind: anticipation of the diversity of needs, realization that accessible environments benefit all people, and the recognition that designing access from the beginning would remove barriers that disable the competencies and capabilities of people who live with a diversability.

Source: https://accessproject.colostate.edu/udl/modules/udl_introduction/udl_concise_intro.pdf

Starting as an architectural idea, the framework was reimagined as an educational concept and practice and named Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

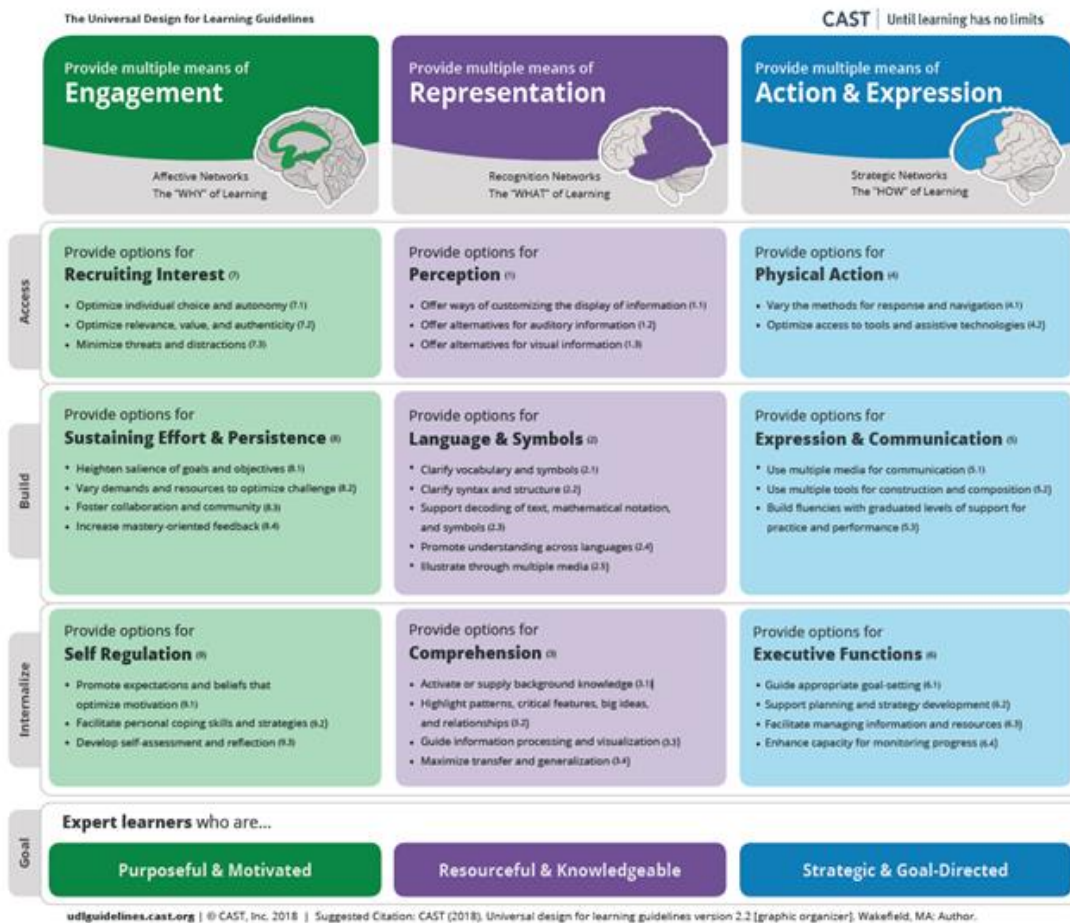
UDL, based on three core principles, provides:

1. Multiple ways of engagement: - provoking interest, sustaining effort and persistence, and self-regulation;
2. Multiple ways of representation – providing various ways for perception, language, symbols, and comprehension;
3. Multiple ways of action and expression: physical action, expression and communication, and executive

The core aspect of the three principles is the presence of options. One of our first questions while designing a course or a class could be: How am I prepared to offer options for my students?

Source: CAST (2018). Universal design for learning guidelines version 2.2 [graphic organizer]. Wakefield, MA: Author

THE CORE PRINCIPLES OF UDL



WHY UNIVERSAL DESIGN AT CAPILANO UNIVERSITY?

Our mission statement states that “Capilano University is a teaching-focused university offering a wide range of programs and services that enable students to succeed in their current studies, in their ongoing education, in their chosen careers, in their lifelong pursuit of knowledge and in their contribution as responsible citizens in a rapidly changing and diverse global community.” In order to assure this promised success, teaching and learning at Capilano University needs to embrace the diverse needs of our students.

Our student population is extremely diverse – a fact that contributes to the enjoyment of our workplace. In 2020 of our 9000+ students, about 2500 are international students and around 500 students registered for accessibility support. Universal Design for Learning offers us a first step toward becoming fully prepared for this diversity and toward creating a tangible sense of belonging for all members of our student body. We are also starting to see the results of the new British Columbia K-12 Curriculum that has prioritized personalized learning and flexible learning environments. The question has changed from how are students ready for schools to how are schools ready for students? Universal Design helps our university prepare for and align with incoming student experiences within the new BC Curriculum and expectations of inclusive and flexible pedagogies.

See: https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/sites/curriculum.gov.bc.ca/files/Curriculum_Brochure.pdf



THE UNIVERSAL DESIGN PRINCIPLES TEACHING/LEARNING/ASSESSING AT CAPILANO UNIVERSITY

We have created 8 principles for Universal Design at Capilano University and framed them as a reflective checklist for all faculty. These principles will offer support during the following three major moments of practice:

- Syllabus Design
- Assignment Design and Application

Taking on this work, universities have adapted the initial core principles of Universal Design to develop their own principles of Universal Design for Learning. The following principles form a new framework to invite Capilano University faculty and administration to lead, teach, create pedagogical environments, and learn proactively by using inclusive strategies that benefit a large spectrum of learners. Although we recognize that many faculty members are already working in these ways within their classrooms, this framework is an invitation to create a community of practice enhanced by the common language of Universal Design. This framework asks faculty to reflect on and name our pedagogical practices, and to continue to think with the question:

How am I prepared to offer options for all my students in an ethical and inclusive manner?

See: <https://www.washington.edu/doit/universal-design-instruction-udi-definition-principles-guidelines-and->

- Class Preparation and Environment Design

THE 8 PRINCIPLES OF UNIVERSAL DESIGN AT CAPILANO UNIVERSITY

1. Equitability - Reimagining Fairness
2. Flexibility - Accommodating Diversabilities
3. Intuitive - Minding the Levels of Stress in Learning and Sharing Knowledge
4. Communication and Pedagogical Relationship
5. Openness and Risk-Taking - Humour, Sense of Wonder, etc.
6. Integration of Indigenous Principles of Learning and Teaching
7. Attention to Body/Mind Connection
8. Promotion of a Community of Learners



1. Equitability - Reimagining Fairness

Teaching a group of diverse students in an equitable way requires an awareness of their diverse needs, a willingness to meet them in different ways, and a recognition that students need different amounts of time for similar tasks. Universal Design provokes us to rethink what is fair in teaching groups of students. We would like to point out that treating students equitably does not hinder fairness but creates it. The aspects that need to play a role in an equitable practice are ability, culture, history, ethnicity, gender fluidity, place, socio-economic factors, and other aspects of identity.

Questions to self

Syllabus Design

- Will all students be able to access the course outline?
How do I make my syllabus accessible (eLearn, printouts, email messages, etc.)?
- Have I used an accessible font?
- Have I used plain/clear language that can be understood by all students?
- Am I mindful of diverse cultural understandings/interpretations of my terminology?
- Is the rhythm of the course realistic for students with diversabilities?

- How am I ready for students who might need to do more than I planned?
- How do I assess my own learning to recognize others' diverse learning rhythms?
- Will there be time for catch up, slow down, or speed up?

Assignment Design and Application

- Are my assignments readable (font, spacing...)?
- Are my assignments accessible to students with diversabilities?
- Are my assignments accessible in an equitable way?
- Do my assignments measure breadth and depth learning?
- Do I assess formatively?
- Do I take note of oral contributions of students?
- Do I take note of peer support of students?
- How can students assess their own learning?
- Are my assignments designed in a way that is easily understood by students, with clear direction for how to complete them successfully?

Class Preparation and Environment Design

- Am I taking the time to get to know my students and their individual needs?
- Have I planned check-ins to assess where my students are at before, during, and at the end of lectures and activities?
- Am I prepared to revise planned activities during class? Am I ready for a change of subject?
- Am I ready for unexpected interruptions?
- Am I ready to get them moving physically or to allow them to use different materials?
- Am I providing options according to student interest, ability, community/environmental relevance?

2. Flexibility - Accommodating Diversabilities

This principle invites us to be flexible with our teaching and to feel okay with it. We mention the 'feeling okay' aspect because planning usually requires steps to be followed in a certain order, in a certain timeframe, and with certain materials. Being flexible disrupts the idea of following a specific (rigid) plan to allow for accommodation of student-centered learning needs.

Questions to self

Syllabus Design

- How do I provide and model flexibility in teaching and learning?
- What learning will I need to do to find connections to students' questions/concerns/worries that could tie, and thus enhance, class content?
- Do I consider flexibility in timing and the order of my teaching modules?
- When things come up, am I able to switch around modules while still maintaining the integrity of the learning outcomes?

Assignment Design and Application

- Are assignments designed with various options for students in mind?
- How will I provide different ways of assessment for the same content?
- Where will I invite student contribution to assignment design and application?
- How do assignments respect different rhythms of learning, writing, or sharing knowledge?
- How do I consider the relationship between engagements of student and test results?

Class Preparation and Environment Design

- Am I providing a variety of materials, multiple choices, and flexible timing?
- How do I create new space options in my classroom?
- How do I keep my classroom flexible and movable?
- Do I consider other spaces except my classroom?
- Are my materials accessible to all students?
- How will I invite student contribution to classroom design/layout?

3. Intuitive - Minding the Levels of Stress in Learning and Sharing Knowledge

Learning and retention of knowledge are very closely connected to the emotional atmosphere around the learning experiences. Research shows a strong link between a positive learning experience and the successful learning:

Quantitative analyses conducted on the self-reports of first year university students suggest that there is a relationship between the ways they emotionally experience their course and the approach they take to the learning of that course. Students who more strongly experience positive emotions, such as hope and pride, and experience fewer negative emotions (such as anger, boredom, anxiety and shame), are likely to be adopting more of a deep approach to learning. (Trigwell, Ellis & Han. 2012, p. 811)

Cognition is connected to emotion. Research suggests that stress, anxiety, fear, etc., profoundly influence the key elements of cognition such as selective attention, working memory, and cognitive control (Okon-Singe, et al. 2015).

Questions to self

Syllabus Design

- Do I consider possible stress factors in my course design?
- Am I mindful of possible triggers in my syllabus?
- Am I considering experiential elements in my course?
- How can I provoke whole-bodily learning, while being mindful of differences in physical capabilities?
- How does my syllabus consider the diversity of previous experience and knowledge of students?
- What are the assumptions in my syllabus?
- Do I weave in my own biases in the course design?

Assignment Design and Application

- How do I avoid unnecessary stress during evaluations?
- How do I assess holistic learning?
- Will students be able to show/share their knowledge using different ways of expressing it?
- How am I welcoming student contribution to the shape of my assignments?

Class Preparation and Environment Design

- How am I making sure that body and mind are connected in my teaching and learning moments?
- How am I allowing moments of pause for my students?
- Have I planned activities that could be done outdoors?
- Am I mindful of the cultural and physical environment while teaching?
- How is my classroom ready to change according to unexpected needs/interests/curiosities/questions of students?

4. Communication and Pedagogical Relationship

Tactful teaching requires taking the time to build pedagogical relationships. Students learn better and pay more attention in a pedagogical atmosphere of trust. Such an environment will benefit communication within the pedagogical square: professor, student, curricular content, and environment.

Questions to self

Syllabus Design

- How does my course allow time to build relationships of trust with my students?
- Do I plan time for experiences, activities that are both curricular and relationship building?

Assignment Design and Application

- Are my assignments clearly written?
- Am I allowing enough time for clarification?
- Do I offer options regarding the kinds of feedback I am providing?
- Do I invite collaborations?

Class Preparation and Environment Design

- What personal stories am I comfortable sharing today?
- How will I check-in today/scan the classroom? (making sure all students are comfortable)
- How will I show my trust in each student's competency to learn?
- How will I try to offer more support for the students who need it?

5. Openness and Risk-taking, Humour, and Sense of Wonder

Being educators is a somewhat risky endeavour, but, each day, we take on this challenge and for many of us, it is our ability to be flexible, to provoke our sense of wonder and/or find joyfulness and humour which keeps us going.

Remaining stagnant, in terms of understanding our students, curriculum, and ourselves is a road few of us want to take. We want to keep the learning environment alive and well. Bringing elements such as openness and humour as well as finding ways to engage our (and our students') sense of wonder in the classroom is what good teachers have been doing for decades. This results in a classroom where we can see evidence of students being fully engaged, taking risks, and understanding the joy and wonder of learning, even when it is head-scratchingly difficult.

Questions to self:

Syllabus Design

- How will this course allow moments of continuous curiosity?
- How can this content keep my sense of wonder alive? What am I curious about in this course?
- What aspect of this course design is unique to me? How will I try something new?

Assignment Design and Application

- How will my assignments contribute to the well-being of the assessed student?
- What environment do I need for a better evaluation of the genuine learning of my students?
- Is this assignment the same as the others or does it bring a new lens to the material?
- Does this assignment complement a previous one, so the ideas are deepened?
- Can this assignment be inspired by an in-class discussion from students?

Class Preparation and Environment Design

- What will I try new today?
- How do I create an environment that invites students to try something new?
- How will I make sure that there will be laughter in my class today?
- How will I invite students' humour into my curricular content of today?
- How will I trigger everyone's sense of wonder today?
- How can the content come at a topic in a different way so new thoughts about the content are created?

6. Integration of Indigenous principles of learning

First Peoples' Principles of Learning

Universal design aligns naturally with the First Peoples' Principles of Learning. In contrast to the traditional western system that expects the child to adapt to the teaching, Indigenous wisdom celebrates the affinities of each child and recognizes that learning is a journey that requires time and patience. Indeed, a Cree elder described the UD principles as "synthesizing the wisdom of our grandmothers". This natural relationship between UD and Indigenous ways of knowing and learning can support faculty on the path to Indigenous our teaching and creating inclusive classrooms.

Purcell, M. (n.d.). FNMI, Aboriginal education & UDL. Retrieved February 03, 2020, from <http://www.threeblockmodel.com/fnmi-aboriginal-education--the-three-block-model-of-udl.html>

BC's new curriculum. (n.d.). Retrieved February 03, 2020, from <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/instructional-samples/first-peoples-principles-learning>



Questions to self:

Syllabus Design

- Do I extend the effects of my teaching to the community and the land on which we are situated?
- How will I offer students opportunities to connect with the community?
- How will I invite Indigenous ways of knowing into my class?

Assignment Design and Application

- Are the assignments offering options for reflection, orality, experiential learning?
- Are the assignment instructions clear and visibly mention the outcome?
- Are the assignments designed with story, history, and emotions in mind?
- How will time (module flow, deadlines, field trips, etc.) be flexible for those who need more/less of it?

Class Preparation and Environment Design

- Am I mindful of the relationships that form in my class? How am I intending to foster and guide them?
- How will I show patience?
- How will I provoke deep conversations that will invite explorations of one's identity?

7. Attention to Body/Mind Connection

The most neglected elements in education are the physical and mental well-being of students. For many years, learning was considered static and focused only on the rational mind of students. Today we know that all aspects of a human being are interconnected and interdependent during the process of learning. Reminding ourselves that we are teaching complex, whole mind/bodies and not just isolated left hemispheres is imperative.

Questions to self

Syllabus Design

- How will my course respect the body-mind connection of my students?
- How is my course active?
- What modules of my course can communicate knowledge that is better understood somatically by some students?



“There is a secret the body holds. How you access your imagination, intuition and perception lies within the body. Making a practice of listening to your imaginative, intuitive, and perceptive abilities activates the energy that lies dormant within your own pulsing body” (Snowber, 2016, p. 4).

Assignment Design and Application

- How will my assessments consider that sitting for too long slows thinking and hinders attention?
- How will my assignments consider the physical environment? How will I be ready for different needs and different rhythms of thinking, making sure that everyone feels included?

Class Preparation and Environment Design

- How will I consider students' different strategies of focus?
- How will I open my classroom to different sitting/standing positions during lectures?
- Have I planned enough moments of pause to stretch, walk, or change the sitting position of my students?
- Can I offer alternative ways of being in the classroom?

8. Promotion of a Community of Learners

By creating a common language and framework to talk about teaching and learning, we can enhance the community of learners already present at Capilano University. However, UD asks us to do more than just simply frame a lesson, it reminds us of the classroom practices that make learning safe, meaningful, and open to challenging perspectives. Often times it is the environment, not the content, that shapes us and our students in the most profound way, and it is with this knowledge that we support a community of faculty learners at CapU to question and endorse a community of learning for our students in our classrooms.

Questions to self

- Does everyone have the right to say pass when sharing ideas in the classroom?
- How do I interrupt?
- How do I create a healthy and open environment?
- How do I turn around the classroom discourse if the dialogue is breaking down?
- How do I make students aware of the importance of language used?

Syllabus Design

- How do I disrupt colonizing language?
- How do I communicate with other instructors to create similarities across our syllabus?

Assignment Design and Application

- Have I designed group assignments?
- Have I thought of random/specific ways of grouping students?
- How do I make sure that each student has space to contribute equitably?

Class Preparation and Environment Design

- How do I create a place of trust and safety where students can share their own ideas?
- What do I do to promote a sense of safety, respect, and active listening?
- Do I have dialogical strategies that focus on content and not people?
- How do I facilitate tense discussions to happen?

TEACHING STORIES AT CAPILANO UNIVERSITY

The authors of this guide, who teach in the School of Allied Health, School of Communication, and the School of Education and Childhood Studies, each share a teaching story that reveals the use of the UD principles. The stories are meant to offer examples of how these principles can support the pedagogical relationships formed between students, faculty, environments, time, and curricula.

STORY #1: THE WALK

Name of the course: Issues and Perspectives on Young Children, Families, and ECCE

INTENTIONS:

Some learning outcomes of this course:

1. Assess and evaluate individual and collective responsibilities within a diverse and interconnected global society.
2. Explain how contexts (e.g. cultural, historical, colonial, economic, technological) shape identity formation and social structures.

Along with the learning outcomes of my courses, I am entertaining a new endeavour, which is to detach (reduce?) stress from the concept of assessment. This pedagogical ideal of mine is to try to make students more comfortable to share their experiences and learning with me and their peers in a context of assessment. I have become more and more open to changing assessment contexts according to collective suggestions coming from students.

UNCERTAINTIES

Some uncertainties come from the notion that I am reworking a whole assignment in order to fit a small number of students. In reality, the new format will benefit the whole class. The newly designed assignments have formats that are more equitable: they invite all abilities and ways of thinking; they contain ideas, words, and ways of thinking that are

familiar to the day-to-day lives of a particular class of students (each group creates and develops its own culture); and they seem to allow students to be themselves during times of assessment. A question that I asked myself was: How can I be objective and subjective at the same time?

THE EXPERIENCE

My first class was running as usual - I greet everyone and I invite them to ask any questions they wish to ask... about...me. I do that to invite humour and to start building trust in the pedagogical relationship. I listen. I answer. I then invite everyone to reflect and take note of a wonderful event that happened in their lives recently. As I go through the attendance list, I ask the students to share their wonderful experience with the group. One by one, students share their experiences. Names start to be connected to stories for both me and the students. This exercise helps the students and me to remember some of the 36 names in the group.

One of the main assignments of this particular course asks students to have conversations with two family members about the uniqueness of their family. The intention of the assignment is to prepare the future educators for a world of diversity. Once they will get to know a few unique qualities of each family, they will realize that the world is defined by the beauty of difference. I would like to get them ready to face this world of difference.

The assignment has a few steps: interviews with the two family members, summarizing the interviews, identifying a theme, researching the theme using the library's database, and writing an essay about the uniqueness of families and how educators should welcome it, nurture it, and be ready for it. The assignment requires a lot of work, planning, time, and care.

It is time to start drafting the essays. Jamie comes to me during a short break and voices their concern about their inability to write the essay and their fear of failing.

I listen. I feel the anxiety emanating from their whole body. I listen.

I invite them for a more extensive talk promising to find a way for them to be successful.

Jamie comes to my office, sits on the cozy miniature couch at the window. They cannot relax. Fear is taking over. As Jamie starts to talk, tears are streaming down their face. Jamie explains to me that writing has always been a very difficult task, and it has become even more difficult because the topic's closeness to the heart. Jamie's life was at an emotional impasse. They performed the family interviews, wrote the summaries, did the research, but got stuck at the essay writing part.

I am thinking to myself: this course has other written assignments that are less personal! Why am I insisting on translating the interview data and discussion into only one kind of output: written work?

Jamie has done beautifully with other assignments!

With all of this in mind, together – Jamie and I - we start to redesign the assignment in a way that still maintained the integrity of the learning outcomes. We start the brainstorming. Jamie has all the materials except the written piece. I ask them to describe the ideal version of this assignment; one that would take away the worries. Jamie responds almost immediately: "I would like to talk about my conversations with my family members; I would like to not worry about the written part". This was enough for me. My mind was reimagining the format and the context of this assignment. I could see that the office was too small for this "talk", so I proposed a walking assignment - a conversation about the research, done while walking around campus. Jamie left my office with a visible sense of relief.

Deadline day. Pouring rain. Walking for two hours. Exquisite results. Smiles and thanks. Uplifting for both of us. I learned so much more about Jamie's research than I would have read in a 4-page essay. Grade: A.

POST-EXPERIENCE REFLECTION

UD principles applied in order to make it a successful pedagogical episode:

- Attention to Body/Mind Connection (why capitals on body/mind connection and not on others in the list)
- Flexibility in use
- Environment and context for teaching, learning, being.

This experience opened my mind to new possibilities. I recall my excitement during the walk, coupled with the excitement of the student who could not stop sharing stories. The assignment's final version was so much richer due to its orality! Thinking, experiencing, and talking were not restricted by words on paper. Orality together with the rhythmical movement of walking had the power to convey experiences in much more detail and depth than the written word would have had! The rain, instead of hindering this assessment process, supported it, by taking away the pressure of a closed environment. The walk side-by-side seemed to take away the (sometimes uncomfortable) need for eye contact and instead, by inviting us to attune to each other's walk under the same umbrella, seemed to have erased contextual barriers that exist and appear to persist between student and teacher in an indoors, four-walled classroom. Removing this assessment moment from the institutional conventions allowed the student to express themselves in a more informal, yet deeper way. Due to the unconventionality of this pedagogical moment, the conversation was lively. I especially enjoyed the interruptions, the reciprocal questionings, and the overall sense of organic dialogue.

The time after the walk offered me an opportunity to rethink many of my practices and plan with new energy for the next steps. I decided to offer options for verbal, visual, or somatic representations of knowledge. This decision came naturally to me since I already teach by employing multiple ways of representation.

STORY #2: RETHINKING ASSESSMENT

Name of courses: Guiding Young Children;
Programming for Under Three's

INTENTIONS:

Some learning outcomes for this course:

1. Recognize how values and beliefs influence our understanding of guidance.
2. Consider how the relationships between the features of the environment and program influence children's learning.
3. Examine, analyze, and critique a variety of program models and philosophies of infant/toddler care locally and globally.
4. Articulate pedagogical practices that create hospitable and welcoming spaces for new families and generate and support relationships with and between children, families, and educators.

Before my involvement with the UD project, I was provoked by a student who had self-identified as dyslexic to think about alternative ways in which students might represent their knowledge and understanding of course content. The student had shared with me a story of learning imbued with self-doubt and insecurities about written output. At that time, I modified a final assignment to better suit this student's learning style by providing Jamie with the opportunity to orally share his research and paper. Fair does not mean the same, it means fair for that individual learner's strengths. However, at the end of the term, I questioned why I wasn't providing the same opportunity to all students and moving into the next term, my focus changed. In thinking with UD principles, I used them as a lens through which to view and redesign, if necessary, my course syllabus, assignments and the learning environment to provide a more inclusive approach to support learning. In the story that follows, I share my experience in one course that I chose to use a UD lens and consider multiple means of engagement within seminars, multiple ways of representation, action and expression, particularly within the evaluation profile (i.e.. course assignments).

UNCERTAINTIES

In reviewing course assignments, I realized how written expression of knowledge was privileged and valued over all other forms of knowledge expression and in this course, although this wasn't necessarily required in order for students to meet the learning outcomes and competencies of the course. In this particular course, weekly expectations required written reflections, demonstrating the students' critical engagement with the readings, and ability to write in APA format. In addition, it seemed that the course assignments, in privileging particular ways of expression (i.e. written expression), didn't honour one of the learning outcomes (#2 above) that the course was working to achieve.

Alongside my work with the UD project, in conjunction with questioning how to accommodate individual student's needs in terms of supporting their success with meeting the learning outcomes of individual courses, I was provoked to critically reflect on my own pedagogical practices and examine how, unintentionally, I might be creating barriers to learning by the ways in which class time was structured, course content was shared, assignments were designed and student outcomes were measured. How might I be more thoughtful and intentional in ensuring that my work reflected the three principles of UD, representation, engagement and expression? How was I structuring class time to ensure that each class offered diversity in terms of how material or ideas were shared and engaged with. Further, I wanted to revisit assignment outlines to really look at how particular ways of knowing and expressions of that knowledge might be privileged over others. I asked how I might redesign assignments to offer greater choice in how students expressed and engaged with course materials.

THE EXPERIENCE

For the final assignment, I provided students with the option to present their final project either through essay format or through dialogue with me in the environment of their choice, such as the classroom, my office, outdoors, or other on-campus location. I was hesitant as I imagined trying to schedule 35 individual student meetings and wondered what I might have created. In anticipation of that, I also

offered students to film their work, include references or send those to me separately. Interestingly, most students preferred to write a paper, and a few chose to have a dialogue. In this particular story, our student, Jamie, chose to visit my office and meet with me. Jamie sat down and after initial greetings and orienting ourselves to each other's day, she introduced her topic and then struggled to get her focus and appeared quite nervous. After a few moments in which I could see that she was clearly uncomfortable I asked if she would like to bring her notes and go for a walk. Relief appeared to come over her and I could see her entire composure relax and she let out a tremendous sigh. We ended up walking through a trail in the woods and she was able to more fully express her ideas without the sense of surveillance perhaps that she felt in my office environment. Through action and movement, she was able to relax and better articulate her ideas.

UD Principles applied:

- ❖ Equitability - Reimagining Fairness
- ❖ Flexibility in Use- Accommodate Diversabilities
- ❖ Intuitive - Minding the Levels of Stress in Learning and Sharing Knowledge
- ❖ Communication and Pedagogical Relationship
- ❖ Attention to Body/Mind Connection

POST-EXPERIENCE REFLECTION

Working with UD principles, I looked at seminar slides and considered the font used, the layout of the visual elements on slides, the use of video and animation. When videos were shown, I tried to provide transcripts of the film content, when available, and had this available on the course Elearn site, with links for all videos that were shown in class. I also looked for opportunities to bridge theory with practice through the sharing of stories, looking for connections so that students could connect the unfamiliar with the familiar, find meaning in what they were reading as well as viewing through other media that expanded on key ideas. Thinking with the UD principles, particularly with the one suggesting flexibility in use, it was quite easy to provide small group, large group discussions,

use storyboards, mind-maps for small group collaboration and visualization of ideas during class-time. This fit naturally with my teaching style. What challenged me more was being able to let go of the value that I attributed to written work over other forms of expression, to consider a balance in how students could express their understanding, their commitment to the learning outcomes and how I was going to evaluate alternative means of expression, in terms of a marking rubric for students. In this particular course, I re-examined assignments so that student learning could be represented through a combination of formal writing, art, film and verbal expression. In this particular story, Jamie was provided with the ability to verbally articulate her understandings and to do this combined with movement, which resulted in a rich dialogue and an expression of her understandings that were much different or more engaged than I had observed in her written work. While I recognize that it may be unrealistic to assume that I can walk-and-talk with all students it has really provoked me to always ensure that mind-body engagement was embodied within our class time together. In addition, course assignments have been designed to offer different modes of expression.

One of the course learning outcomes is that students will consider how the relationships between the features of the environment and program influence children's learning. It seemed fitting to begin to question how the classroom structure and the assignments were designed in ways that supported the variability of learning styles and to enhance the students' engagement with ideas through different mediums of expression. Moving forward, I will continue to challenge myself to critique the structure of class time, the assessment of student learning to provide a more universal design orientation to the material and the outcomes.

STORY #3 - THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

Name of course: Interpreting CMNS Documents

INTENTIONS:

Some learning outcomes of this course:

1. Understand and negotiate problems of knowledge and power in the conduct of documentary research in communication and media studies
2. Understand how 'reflexivity' in documentary research helps situate it into larger frameworks and broader contexts.

The class is 3 hours long and, each week, we engage with unique content in self-contained workshops, with the overarching goal of learning to interpret communication documents from various perspectives.

One particular workshop focuses on language bias. It is one of those classes that feels essential for this specific course, but also necessary for their overall learning at CapU.

I created this lesson plan with the goals of:

- 1) emphasizing the power of language
- 2) providing space to recognize taken-for-granted problematic phrasing
- 3) providing a guide to unbiased language use
- 4) promoting the notion that language is always changing and we need to have confidence and a will to keep working towards unbiased, thoughtful and meaningful word usage, even if it means disclosing our lack of knowledge.

UNCERTAINTIES

The challenge each week was to create a workshop that had engaging activities, that connected nicely with the content, but also had unique activities so the students didn't feel the workshop redundant. This meant I was always on the lookout for new activities. Luckily, my favourite PD activity, the impromptu hallway conversations with colleagues, was there to

inspire me. One afternoon we were joking about the idea of a pop quiz; since it isn't really part of any of our teaching repertoires it struck us as an amusing thought. However, interest quickly waned as we began to discuss the time it will take to develop, as well as the worry, stress, or boredom it might provoke for the students.

Yet there was still something about the format of a quiz that was appealing.

A quiz promotes deep concentration on each sentence and asks students to make judgments at a fairly rapid rate. This concentration combined with rapid decision making seemed perfect for a lesson on word choice and cultural presuppositions. I needed to alter the format, from reprimanding (zero for wrong answer) to contemplation and discussion among a small (safe) group.

There were still a few uncertainties I needed to deal with: Was this going to be boring? Would the groups provide a means for everyone's voice to be heard? What would happen if people thought their current language use was unproblematic? How could I instill the idea that we always need to check and be ready to change our ways of thinking and speaking? Would the current rhetoric of 'why do we need all this political correctness' rear its head?

THE EXPERIENCE

I present three sentences on the PowerPoint presentation each containing obvious language bias: gender, ability, and age. The students are asked to turn to their groups and try to 'fix' the biases they see in the sentences, as well as, tell us why this language is problematic. This was done with ease. In the past, this might have been where I ended the lesson; with a few more examples and a short lecture on the power of language connecting back to our lessons on research history and biased interpretations. This year, however, I wanted to let them play, use their expertise and investigate language bias that might be tricky, new, unique through the quiz format.

This lesson had three major components:

- 1) the research and development of tricky sentences to highlight nuanced language bias;
- 2) teaching the group about their language bias; and
- 3) testing the other groups, using the short quiz format (students added three of their own biased sentences to a class-wide quiz - making sure they have the correct answers are written on the backside of the index card).

In their groups they were given a bundle of materials related to a particular language bias: ageism, race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability.

Jamie and their group started to flip through the supplemental documents, and I heard expressions of surprise and laughter at some older terms that have since been, thankfully, erased from our language. They then hunker down and start to do more research online. Some groups go outside into the hallway to sit and chat; others head to an empty room next door. Jamie's group stays in the classroom - they are happy that there is space to move since they don't want the other groups to overhear their strategy for developing their tricky sentences.

Having them in small groups allows the students to highlight their own personal skills. I often see one student volunteering to do the research, others do the explaining or summarizing, others look for images, comics, graphs or videos.

Jamie's group debates and shares, over and over, examples of inappropriate and appropriate sentences. This part of the lesson seems to evoke the most vigorous discussion - what type of quiz sentences to create - because they don't want to be seen as creating easy/obvious sentences - but they also need to keep in mind that their learning outcomes need to connect with their quiz outcomes. Research is important, but it is the last two components is where I see the most learning. When the groups are asked to teach, they often use examples to illustrate the do and don't of language usage. I am always astonished by the examples they share from their personal lives; both by the fact that these young people still face biased language, directed at them, but they also often

feel that they this is 'just how it is' or they are in a position of subordination that they feel powerless.

Once the teaching is complete, they are asked to leave the index cards, with the biased sentence on one side and the unbiased on on the other, on their tables and as a group navigate to another table to correct the sentence left by the other group.

I've done this outside when it is nice - using the steps in the Cedar courtyard - getting them to stand by the table and then walk to another table makes it feel a bit different than continuing to sit at their tables and chairs. Even the simple situation of jostling to see the index card and thus standing closer to someone new, each time, helps to facilitate new conversations, which can, of course, be modified for those who cannot navigate the space as easily.

After they have walked around all of the tables, we come back as a group and I ask the teaching group to read out their card - first the incorrect version and then their corrected version. They ask their peers if there are any additional correct sentences and the debates begin. We have time for debate and give kudos to those who had clever and tricky sentences that really made us question taken-for-granted phrasing. Peers give alternative answers and the group debates whether the answers could be correct. Again, lively discussion is sparked by these alternative answers, but also the nuances and uncertainty that come with biased language is expressed more clearly.

POST-EXPERIENCE REFLECTIONS

Thinking about this lesson, which was created as a way to engage the students, I am able to see many connections with the UD principles.

❖ **Equitability- Reimagining Fairness** - I provide multiple ways of explaining the project to the groups including having written (step-by-step) instructions on the board and then I make sure I stop by each group and reiterate, orally, what they are asked to do. I also provide paper copies of resources, as well, as allow them to access information online and from their own lived experiences.

❖ **Flexibility – Accommodating Diversabilities** - with larger groups, and multiple elements included in the project, everyone could find and utilize their skill set whether it be searching for research, finding images or examples, reading, summarizing, speaking, providing personal examples, or handwriting the quiz. This makes it a much more inclusive activity and allows those students who want to talk to step up and those who want to do the digging into the field to take on that role.

❖ **Intuitive- Minding the levels of Stress in learning and Sharing Knowledge** - the content of this lessons is language and every student has a personal experience with ethical or unethical usage of terms and can bring that to the discussion. If they don't want to share their experiences, they will hear stories that will possibly resonate with them and then can chime in with a head nod or quick acknowledgement. If they have not experienced bias, they can hear from fellow peers of their experience, which brings the learning closer to home.

❖ **Communication and pedagogical relationship**- I make sure that we work up to this lesson with multiple group lessons that aim to give them a chance to chat with smaller groups, present and summarize texts. This approach helps to create a cooperative environment so when the language bias lesson comes up, they know to focus on the issues not on the person.

❖ **Openness and risk-taking - humour, sense of wonder** - since there is an opportunity for storytelling, there will be an opportunity to connect with a sense of wonder about social situations and terms being used. For the most part the sense of wonder within the class has been outrage and disgust with regards to how fellow classmates have been treated. But these emotionally supported stories will stick with us, and we can help to problem solve some of the social situations fellow students find themselves in.

❖ **Integration of Indigenous principles of learning** - research has been and can continue to be if we are not cautious, a colonizing exercise and we need to take constant steps towards decolonizing language, thought, research and interpretations. Checking taken-for-granted everyday language is a step towards recognizing preconceived notions of ourselves, family, community, the land, the spirits and the ancestors.

❖ **Attention to Body/Mind Connection** - even the smallest amount of movement helps change the

classroom discussion. Moving from table to table means an opportunity to stand next to someone new each time and thus a possibility of new interactions. I have even taken this exercise outside since there are only the small cue cards that need to be transported, and that also helps to great cross pollination between students and enriches the conversation as a new environment provokes new ways of being.

❖ **Promotion of a Community of Learners** - An important component of this assignment is that the quiz is not marked; it is a challenge to get the answer correct, but no one will ever know if you got it wrong. We share the results orally and each time there tends to be a few 'right' sentences so even when you aren't exactly correct, you can be close but the real learning comes from the conversations that seek to get at the right answer and the success felt when an alternative sentence is seen as valid.

STORY #4: CHANGING THE GAME

Course name: Caring for Individuals with Cognitive and Mental Health Challenges

My interest in Universal Design started with frustration in my professional and personal lives. I often saw students struggling to succeed because the education system was not set up to recognize their strengths or support their individual needs. Success was narrowly defined and accessible to few. I knew there had to be a better way than the “round peg in a round hole” system we were working in. The opportunity to work on the Universal Design project came at a great time.

INTENTIONS

I decided to start with one of the more challenging courses in the Health Care Assistant curriculum: Caring for Individuals with Cognitive and Mental Health Challenges. Not only is the course content challenging, but it is also scheduled in an intensive format: ten six-hour classes taught over two weeks. It is the last theory course offered in the program and is immediately followed by a 30-hour-shift practicum where students are required to put their learning into practice.

Some learning outcomes of this course:

Discuss ways to organize, administer and evaluate person-centered care and assistance for clients experiencing cognitive health challenges (dementia), and mental health challenges by:

1. Demonstrating choices and actions on a sound understanding of the physical, cognitive and psycho-social processes of various kinds of dementia.

2. Demonstrating choices and actions on an understanding of environmental influences on behaviours.

My intention was to inspire students to engage with the course content and to provide them with flexible options to demonstrate their new knowledge, in the short period of time the course allowed. The course is content-heavy, and much of the material is new to the students. The course also contains a practical component that teaches students person-centered

strategies and techniques for working with people with dementia. Understanding the necessity of these and integrating them into practice are vital for the safety and well-being of the students and the people they care for. Historically, the course was taught in a way that worked well for those with prior experience with dementia, or a strong interest in the subject, but not as well for others. In order to spark curiosity and engagement, and sustain it, I wanted to engage the students’ affective networks. It’s in these regions of the brain - in charge of motivation, focus, and persistence, that the “why” of learning is formed.

UNCERTAINTIES

a) The challenge with helping students connect with content emotionally is that everyone’s “why” is different. This particular class included students with diverse learning needs, genders, socio-economic backgrounds, languages, cultures, and ideologies. Three of the students were internationally educated nurses with a strong grasp of the theory, but uncertain about how to apply the theory to practice. One student was able to immediately connect with the concepts emotionally but has had negative experiences with the education system since childhood and struggled to present her knowledge in writing. I was uncertain how to design activities and assignments that would engage and challenge each student, and I didn’t have time to provide a lot of different options.

b) AHA moments:

- With such a big topic, and such a short time frame, I had to be intentional about what information and resources I used, rather than trying to share everything I know about dementia and mental health in ten days.

- I realized that I did not need to have written assessments for each learning outcome, and that every student didn’t need to demonstrate their learning using the same kind of assessment.

THE EXPERIENCE

For the last two years, I have been incorporating an 8-minute activity called the Virtual Dementia Tour (VDT) into the course. The tour is an evidence-based immersive activity designed to provide participants with a small taste of the experience of dementia. Many of our students have never met someone with dementia and find it difficult to imagine anything

beyond the images portrayed in the media - forgetfulness and sometimes random acts of aggression. The first couple of times I ran the tour, it was scheduled at the end of the course, with the intention that students would have a base of theoretical knowledge before the experience. For this cohort of students, I scheduled it on the first day, before even reviewing the course outline. These students experienced the VDT with no idea what to expect. The experience had an immediate emotional impact that stayed with them throughout the course. It provided context, and a personal connection with the course content, which was evident in their engagement and their thoughtful contributions in class.

Moving forward with the course, I was thinking with the UD principles and decided that it was important that students were able to demonstrate their learning in flexible ways that could be assessed quickly and easily. In previous terms, the students would write two exams and submit three short written assignments - a challenge to do in ten days! Despite a strong urge to cling to the familiar, I started to shift my thinking and planning toward more inclusive ways of assessing: I kept the first written exam but changed the second exam to an oral format; I embedded two of the three short assignments into the regular in-class activities and did not assign marks; and I changed the format of the third assignment to allow flexibility. I revised another assignment to allow students to document and present their research to the instructor and the class in a variety of formats: written, video, audio recording, live demonstration, infographic, etc. This provided each student with the opportunity to successfully demonstrate their learning. This change of context allowed students to be fairly assessed: instead of rewarding students with strong public speaking or technical skills and penalizing those who may have just as much knowledge but struggle with presentations, I was able, through the diversity and flexibility of the new formats, to assess in an equitable way all students.

POST-EXPERIENCE REFLECTION

The experience of challenging my biases as an educator and allowing for flexibility in the class format, especially the assessments, was scary and exhilarating. It was helpful to consider the UD principles when designing the classes:

❖ **Equitability – Reimagining Fairness**

Equitability opens our eyes to the actual needs of students and their personal ways of sharing their learning. Taking the time to know whose needs is a good pedagogical investment.

❖ **Flexibility – Accommodating Diversabilities**

Providing multiple means of demonstrating their learning, particularly in the assignment that was to be shared with the class, gave students a chance to showcase their strengths and interests, and focus on the learning rather than the stress of presenting to their classmates in a way that wasn't comfortable for them. Using multiple means of assessment gave me much better insight into what students actually knew. An example is the oral exam given at the end of the course; although I was afraid that it would be difficult to assess their learning objectively, it was actually easier in this format. Rather than attempting to read the students' minds while interpreting words on a page, I was able to ask clarifying questions. Some students who struggled to express themselves needed only a slight prompt to fully answer a question, and it was easy to adjust their mark accordingly.

❖ **Intuitive - Minding the Levels of Stress in Learning and Sharing Knowledge**

The process of taking in new information, integrating it with previous knowledge, and demonstrating that learning to classmates and teachers is inherently stressful. Add an accelerated format, and the stress multiplies. It can also be stressful for teachers to operate in that environment, and how we manage our own stress has an impact on our students' experiences. Applying the principles of UD to this course had both positive and negative effects on the students' stress levels. This required some careful reflection. One of the challenges that I will address in future classes is making my expectations very clear to the students. Allowing multiple means of expression suddenly was a little challenging for students who were used to more traditional ways of being assessed. I realized that change doesn't need to be all-encompassing and immediate; you can add UD

practices into your classes over time, at a pace that works for you and your students. Feedback from students and colleagues is essential; not every idea will work, and even if it works for you, it might require modifications for others. UD is intended to reduce stress, not increase it.

❖ Communication and Pedagogical Relationship

Careful preparation and clear communication are essential when you are suddenly “changing the game” for students. I had to constantly remind myself that I had had time to prepare for this, and the principles behind UD weren’t new to me - I was further along in the process than my students were. I’ll never forget their surprised reaction when I presented them with this new format. I gave them what I saw as a gift: control over their own learning, and their first response was “no thank you”, followed by “please just tell us what to do”. Moving forward required redefining our relationship, shifting power out of my hands and into theirs.

Openness and risk-taking - humour, sense of wonder, etc.

Openness to risk is at the heart of UD, requiring the instructor to recognize ingrained biases and override them, trusting that it will enhance the learning experience, not detract from it. Starting the course with the immersive experience was a simple change that made a big impact. It allowed the very diverse student group to begin the course with a new shared experience and connect with each other based on that. In effect, it leveled the playing field.

Embed the Indigenous principles of learning and teaching

I was lucky to have a wonderful Indigenous student in this cohort. Her grades in other courses hovered near the passing mark of 70%, and she had had to repeat two courses. The grades did not reflect her capabilities. The opportunity to demonstrate her knowledge verbally in this course allowed her to showcase her gifts - an innate capacity to relate with others, wisdom gained from years of lived experience, and patience - in a way that would have been next to impossible to capture with a multiple choice test. If I would have stuck with the same format I would have been using, she likely wouldn’t have passed the course. Now, she’s working with people with dementia and says she has found her calling. UD for the win!

❖ Attention to Body/Mind Connection

Beginning the course with the Virtual Dementia Tour put us squarely in our bodies and we were able to return to that throughout the course.

Promote a Community of Learners

When you co-create the learning experience with the learners it creates a wonderful sense of trust in the classroom, and both the students and instructor emerge better for it.

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