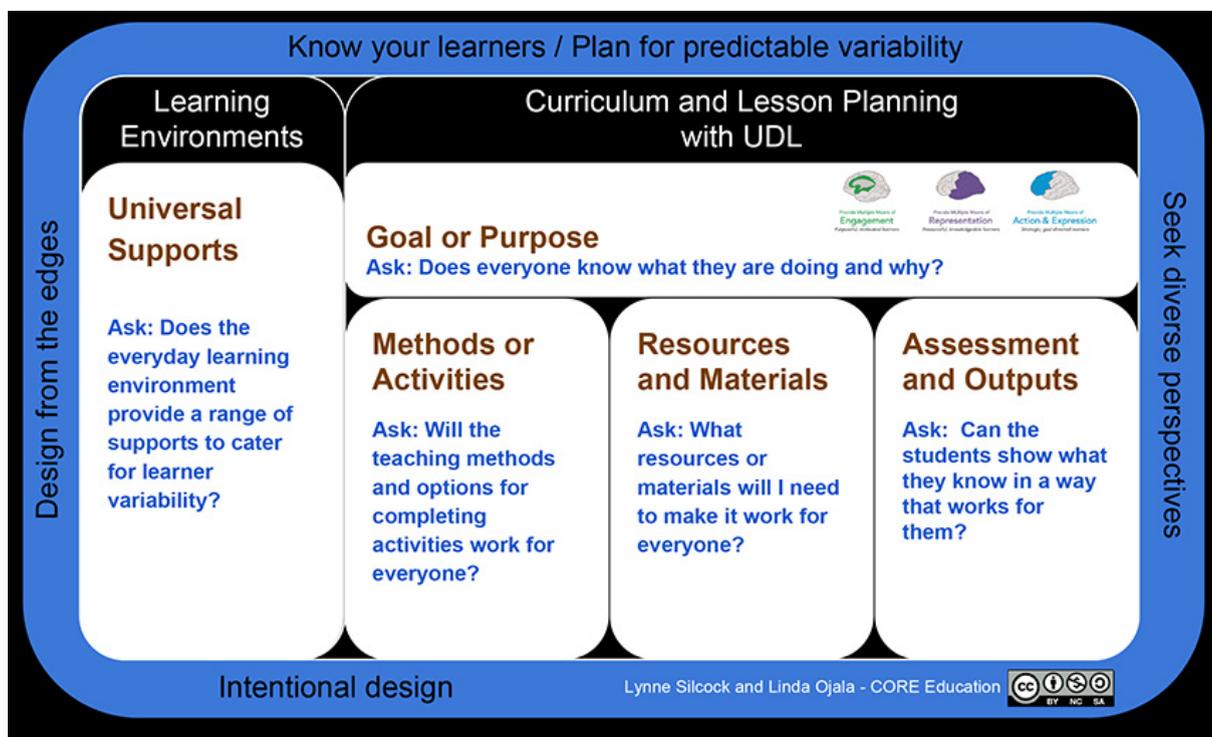


Universal Design for Learning in curriculum planning and lesson design

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In [my last few blogs](#), I have unpacked UDL principles and UDL thinking. Once people understand the basic principles of UDL they often ask how to use those principles in class and lesson planning.

The quick and easy answer is to consider all your learners, and use the UDL principles throughout every aspect of the design and planning process. But this advice is not always practical enough to be very helpful. In response, Linda Ojala and I have synthesised some earlier work from a variety of sources [1](#) into a framework to support the planning process.



[Download this chart](#) (PDF)

Let's break this down...

UNIVERSAL SUPPORTS

Does the everyday learning environment provide a range of supports to cater for student variability?

Universal Supports are those things that exist in the learning environment that the teacher does not have to think about or plan for daily, thus saving teachers time and energy.

They are typically supports that are common to several learning activities. Universal Supports include the physical, emotional, and learning environment in the classroom as well as well-established systems and protocols that are so embedded that they are simply 'the way we do things around here'.

Some examples are:

- having black pens for your whiteboard rather than green ones that are harder to see
- daily routines and timetables (and visual displays showing these)
- having a variety of furniture and spaces to suit different tasks and preferences
- visuals and posters to support thinking frameworks, problem-solving, task completion etc
- having digital technologies that students can use to personalise their learning.

GOAL OR PURPOSE

Ask: Does everyone know what they are doing and why?

Goals give us direction, so it is important that everyone is clear about the purpose of their learning and what they need to do to achieve success. Articulating goals can be as simple as stating them at the outset of a lesson, or writing them on the board, but should always be expressed in ways that are understood by all.

Group or whole-class goals should allow for student variability so that each student can see how the goal is appropriate for them. Lastly, always make sure that the means of achieving the goal is not confused with the goal itself.

For example, if students are researching content material, the means of doing the task may include reading, but, unless you are purposefully targeting reading, this should not be part of the goal. In this scenario, students who cannot read the material (such as those with dyslexia), can still successfully complete the task by using tools like text-to-speech technology.

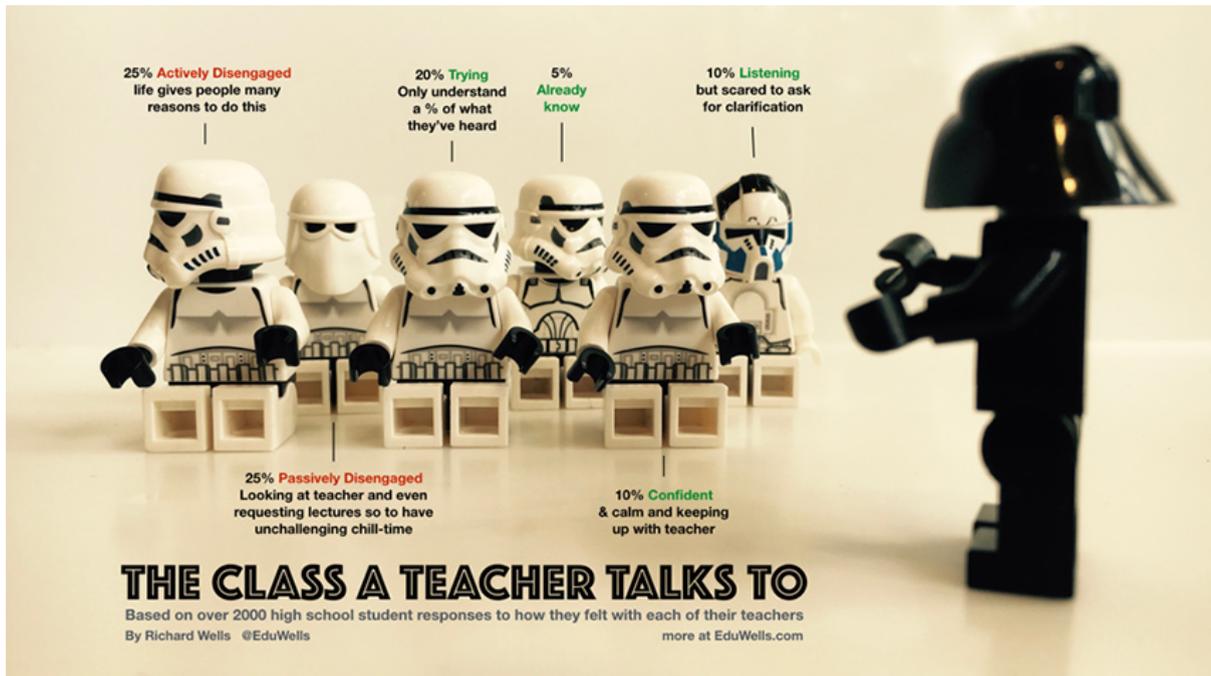
How the goal is met should not interfere with achieving the goal of learning that content—just as a GPS doesn't provide only one route to a destination but may offer alternative routes based on variable factors, such as traffic, non-highway options, and so forth².

TEACHING APPROACHES AND ACTIVITIES

Ask: Will the teaching approaches and options for completing activities work for everyone?

When planning teaching approaches and learning activities, consider if the way you plan to do things will work for each and every student in the class.

For example, the following poster by Richard Wells may make us rethink the effectiveness of whole-class teaching.



If you know (or think it is likely) at the outset that it won't work for everyone, ask:

1. Why are we doing it this way?
2. Is there another way of approaching the teaching and learning that is more likely to work for everyone?
3. What extra supports are needed to ensure everyone is successful?

Co-creating with students often provides a powerful alliance as students can identify innovative ways to do things and provide ideas about the things that work for them.

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

Ask: What resources or materials will I need to make it work for everyone?

Supporting resources can help students to know what to do, how to do it and what success looks like.

Resources that support students to undertake the task come in a variety of formats and include:

1. frameworks that break tasks down into steps
2. exemplars
3. visuals to aid comprehension
4. cheat sheets
5. word lists
6. materials or multimedia resources that allow students to learn in a variety of ways.

Ask: Are the resources or materials accessible and usable by everyone?

When designing resources, consider whether they are accessible and usable by all. Worksheets and workbooks are inaccessible for students who need reading support and those who have low vision or who are blind.

By digitising content, students can personalise how they access the material. For example, the text could be read aloud using text-to-speech, enlarged for students who have low vision, or converted to Braille.

ASSESSMENT AND OUTPUTS

Ask: Can the students show what they know in a way that works for them?

For some students, assessments in specific formats or under certain conditions may not provide a good gauge of their learning. A strengths-based approach with flexible assessment conditions can more accurately assess student learning.

For example, if we ask a student who has difficulty using a pen to write to show their learning and comprehension, we may learn very little about their learning and a lot about their writing ability — something it is likely we already knew.

Flexible assessments options can be achieved by:

1. using a range of formats for evidence of learning (e.g. audio, video, and a variety of multimedia options)
2. identifying barriers for students, and providing tools such as text-to-speech, voice typing and other reader/writer options to overcome these
3. provide flexible timing, scheduling, and accommodations to gain the best evidence of learning.

FINAL WORD

We hope this framework helps you apply UDL principles in a class or lesson-planning context. In the end, it is really about having that important question at the heart of everything you do: Will it work for everyone?

Resources and further information about UDL:

- Download Lynne and Lynda's "[Know your Learners/Plan for predictable variability](#)" [chart](#) (PDF)
- Other information and resources about that may interest you on [Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\)](#)

¹ Including work from [CAST](#), Chrissie Butler, and this [article](#) by David Gordon

² [How UDL can get you to personalized learning](#), eSchool News, David Gordon (CAST).

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[Lynne Silcock](#) is a facilitator for Learning with Digital Technologies and Connected Learning Advisory. Lynne has a background in secondary teaching and sports leadership. Her teaching experience is primarily in special education, but includes secondary maths, geography, and outdoor education. Prior to joining CORE, Lynne worked in the Ministry of Education as the national coordinator for the NZ assistive technology team. She has expertise in how specialised and standard technologies can be used to support all learners, but especially those with disabilities or special learning needs. She has been an advocate of Universal Design for Learning for many years as she sees the potential for this framework to help teachers support those who have failed to thrive in traditional classrooms.