Universal Design: a valuable resource to enhance and improve teaching and learning

Caoimhe Kiernan
TU Dublin, caoimhe.kiernan@tudublin.ie

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Caoimhe Kiernan, Assistant Lecturer, TU Dublin (Tallaght)

caoimhe.kiernan@tudublin.ie

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is described as a "set of principles for curriculum development that give all individuals equal opportunities to learn, including students with disabilities" (AHEAD, 2017). It is student-centred, and "promotes flexible materials and alternative activities for students with different abilities" (Baroni & Lazzari, 2022). The goal of utilising UDL in university classrooms is to both "improve and optimise teaching" and to enhance the learning of all students, considering all learning styles and motivations for learning (ibid). UDL focuses on improving student outcomes and on promoting the ability to be flexible in employing certain teaching methodologies and strategies. This short piece describes my experience of undertaking the Digital Badge for Universal Design in Teaching and Learning with the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning.

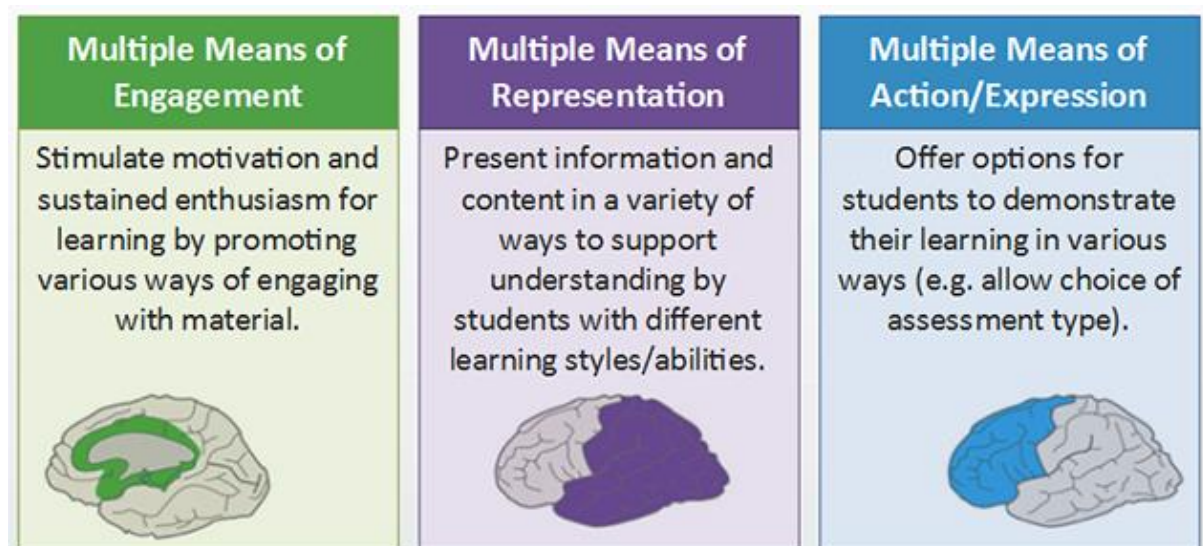| Multiple Means of Engagement	Multiple Means of Representation	Multiple Means of Action/Expression
Stimulate motivation and sustained enthusiasm for learning by promoting various ways of engaging with material.	Present information and content in a variety of ways to support understanding by students with different learning styles/abilities.	Offer options for students to demonstrate their learning in various ways (e.g. allow choice of assessment type).

Figure 1: UDL Guidelines (AHEAD, 2017)

CAST (a US-based organisation, originally the Center for Applied Special Technology) first drafted the UDL guidelines relating to each of the core principles of UDL (CAST, 2018). These include multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation and multiple means of action/expression. The guidelines are centred around the idea that there is no such thing as an "average" or "typical" student. All learner abilities should be catered for. The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, AHEAD and the UCD Access and Lifelong Learning collaborated to create the Digital Badge for Universal Design in Teaching and Learning. These bodies designed instructions and learning materials for a "short introductory professional development course on universal design for learning" (AHEAD, 2022). The course was delivered as part of a national rollout to higher and further education and training staff through a specifically designed online learning platform.

The course that I participated in required approximately 25 learner hours and was run over 10 weeks from October to December 2022. (A shorter module was also offered to allow those interested to become a facilitator for the course, and this required an additional five learner hours.) While the course was run online, it was facilitated by staff within each individual institution who had previously done the facilitator course. Learners engage with five short pre-recorded webinars which build the learner knowledge of UDL and encourage self-reflection. These modules explore topics such as introducing UDL, examining the UDL Guidelines and reflecting on your own practice. The pre-recorded webinars are supplemented by several live online sessions which encourage engagement and discussion with the module content. Simultaneously, learners also engage with peer groups (organised by a facilitator in their own institution) to discuss topics such as diversity within their institution, looking at how UDL can help to reduce barriers to learning, and brainstorming how to include UDL in your own teaching practice. Finally, learners redesign at least one aspect of a module they

deliver using UDL principles (e.g. assessment, teaching materials, classroom resources, student activities etc.), implement and deliver the activity, and produce a short report on the process of the redesign.

Digital Badge

I began teaching full-time at TU Dublin in January 2022 as an assistant lecturer in Law on the Tallaght campus, which has a diverse student population of over 5,000 students (both full and part-time). I teach a broad range of modules to students on non-law programmes, including legal studies to Applied Social Care students, Business Law to International Business students, and Marketing Law to Marketing students. I realised early on that part of my role would be adapting the module content for my students, to ensure it was relevant, approachable, and understandable, and in this way identified a gap in my own learning: while I had undertaken CPD modules in pedagogy, I had never specifically looked into UDL and had no idea how I could implement it into my own teaching. While preparing for classes in early September 2022, I received a notification about the upcoming Digital Badge in UDL. I was already interested in the area, and decided to participate to supplement my own knowledge and perhaps improve my teaching.

Over the ten weeks of the course, I utilised the UDL Guidelines, undertook the redesign activity, and learned valuable insights from my peer group. I also completed the additional course to become a facilitator of the module. While the course advises you to change your practice only one thing at a time, the difference that one change can make is startling. I piloted a bi-weekly quiz with one of my classes, utilising a flipped classroom technique, and the overall performance of that group changed drastically: their classroom behaviour and engagement improved, and so did learner enjoyment of the module. However, the biggest

change the course made was to my own mindset. I believe that while we all make mistakes, the biggest error we can make is refusing to change. Learning about UDL through this course has been instrumental in my growth as an educator, and in developing my fundamental teaching philosophy. As Boothe et al. (2018) state, in "order to meet the wide variety of learning needs and abilities in the classroom, teachers must find innovative methods for reaching [a] diverse population of students". Utilising UDL in your university classroom is one such way to cater for these diverse learning needs and abilities. The Digital Badge for Universal Design in Teaching and Learning is an incredibly valuable resource for any individual looking to enhance and improve their own teaching.

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