

What is UDL?

How can we use it?

It sounds like a way forward!
(Staff Comments 2018)

Aims:

- To improve student engagement
- To increase success in assessment through application of UDL approaches

Objectives:

- To reflect on current practice & inform changes to learning and teaching
- To support staffs' professional development in UDL as an inclusive pedagogical approach.
- To include the student voice in development & change.
- To review impact of inclusive/UDL changes made.

Potential Benefits of UDL:

- Anticipatory, responsive and inclusive;
- Involves all support services;
- Positive student engagement;
- Students achieving their aspirations;
- Access to professional courses;
- Promotion in employment.

Introduction:

The changing demographic of Foundation Degrees' (FD) shows younger students with limited work experience studying alongside traditional mature, experienced workers. It was important to ensure learning approaches are designed in a way that are relevant for all students' academic ability and learning experiences (Entwistle, 2009).

A Universal Design for learning (UDL) approach was introduced to the Department in response to the data on achievement and retention which highlighted the need for new direction (Moriarty & Scarffe, 2019). With increasing student numbers and various learning needs there was necessity for teaching approaches which develop an inclusive community of learners and practitioners (Rao & Meo, 2016; Kieran & Anderson, 2018). The Department's response included:

- Supporting staff with knowledge, skills and capacity to embark on a journey of inclusive practice through UDL;
- Understanding students' expectations of Higher Education.
- Recognising staffs' perspectives and potential emotional impact related to the change process (Dasborough, Lamb, & Suseno, 2015); and
- Creating enthusiasm for the new approach.

Methodology:

A reflective narrative focused on the activities associated with the team's change management journey including cycle of experience, reflection and further changes (Keesing-Styles et al, 2014).

Activities:

- Workshops to support learning;
- Discussions/planning within team meetings;
- Audit of modules/course development;
- Student consultation & input;
- Inclusive assessment and teaching approaches.

Initial Reflection and Action:

In the first instance, I was tasked with reviewing data related to student engagement, experiences, achievement and retention. The data highlighted a need to create opportunities for staff and students to work differently.

Prior to cultivating the 'new' inclusive culture, the UDL approach was introduced to the team and assessed in terms of supporting student learning. To that end, a year ago as Academic Group Lead (now Head of Department), I incorporated UDL and inclusive approaches into planning and development activities. Any challenges to implementing the change in pedagogical approach is assessed through my on-going reflection and evaluation activities with the team.

As a whole Department we participated in workshops about UDL, inclusive assessment policy, better understanding of courses and student learning needs(Bracken, 2019). Opportunities to assess and reflect on what was working, where we need to improve and to identify solutions together were part of team meetings. We continue to be mindful of learner variability and aim to design learning approaches that are relevant for all students respecting individual differences and academic development needs (Kieran & Anderson, 2018). The work so far has led to several changes in module assessment, use of TEL and regular review of learning and teaching approaches.

- Being able to choose assessment type reduced anxiety.
- New ways of providing support makes it easier to ask for help.
- Student input changed direction of teaching; satisfaction increased.

Outcomes:

A Department wide approach allows staff to reflect, question, observe and cooperate when trying new ways of teaching:

Effective community of professional practitioners--community of learners.

The learning experience crosses course boundaries and allows the ideal of inclusivity to become a reality. Staff are working collaboratively sharing practice experiences. Action research being planned to identify effectiveness of change.

Student engagement and confidence

Students are providing regular feed back and feed forward to staff. Confidence to speak with staff and offer suggestions regarding changes is growing.

Case study

Alison*, a student with SpLD has accessed the UDL assessment offering and has achieved A+ in the modules that have trialled this. Research will continue by exploring her lived experience of these new forms of assessments

On-going Developments:

- UDL audit of current curriculum and assessment practices across all learning sites, led by Head of Department inclusive of partner colleges (Moriarty & Scarffe 2019)
- Focus on praxis: observing, reflecting, questioning, and collaborating with others to realise new ways of teaching (Entwistle 2009).
- New approaches to supporting students/personalised learning; example: changes to seminar sessions to enable scaffolding around academic skills development.
- Meetings & consultations with students to identify how students learn, ideas to action and what is working well.
- Inclusive assessment providing alternative options for all students; monitoring achievement and learning outcomes.
- Research projects established as part of module changes inclusive of student participation;
- Developing new courses with student and employer input.

References

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