

# Making Sense of Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an educational approach that benefits all students by reducing barriers to learning and addressing the different learning needs of students.



## Key understandings

- This approach, based on universal design in architecture, was developed by David Rose and his colleagues at the Centre for Applied Special Technology (CAST).
- UDL is based on three main principles – give learners different ways to acquire information through *multiple means of representation*; give learners different ways to demonstrate learning through *multiple means of expression*; and tap into learners' motivation and interests through *multiple means of engagement*.
- A truly UDL learning environment depends on the availability of digital learning resources, flexible instructional practices, learner-centered curriculum and support from school leaders.
- A Universal Design for Learning approach can increase student engagement and academic success, and help teachers better support every student in their classroom.

## For more information on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), view the following videos in this series:

- *Using Differentiated Instruction to Support All Learners*
- *Using Assistive Technology to Support Learning*
- *Scaffolding for Student Success*

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*In a diverse classroom, no single method can reach all learners. Multiple pathways to achieving learning goals are needed.*

*Making a Difference, Alberta Education*”

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## Questions for discussion

- What does it mean that Universal Design for Learning can “blur the line between ‘regular’ education and ‘special’ education?” Give an example from your experience.
- Learning technologies are an integral part of a UDL approach; however, simply using technology in the classroom is not implementing UDL. How do you understand this statement in light of the three principles of UDL?
- How can school leaders best support the development of UDL learning environments?
- What other questions do you have about Universal Design for Learning, based on your own experience and current context?

## Taking the Pulse



at the school and authority level...

- What kinds of data are being collaboratively and systematically collected and analyzed for the benefit of all learners?
- What resources are required to support the implementation of a UDL approach?
- What infrastructure is required to support the implementation of a UDL approach?
- How are current information sources (research, evidence, and lessons learned) informing professional learning activities related to UDL?

Adapted from *A Guide to Support Implementation: Essential Conditions* [www.essentialconditions.ca](http://www.essentialconditions.ca)



... Universal Design for Learning is a “curb cut” for the classroom. ...UDL is an approach to designing educational environments and products so they can be used by the widest range of students without adaptation.

Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST)



## For more information

- *Making a Difference: Meeting Diverse Learning Needs with Differentiated Instruction* This Alberta Education resource describes the roles of Universal Design for Learning and technology in addressing diverse learning needs. [http://education.alberta.ca/media/1234045/makingadifference\\_2010.pdf](http://education.alberta.ca/media/1234045/makingadifference_2010.pdf)
- *Teaching Every Student in the Digital Age: Universal Design for Learning* (ASCD, 2002) by David Rose and Anne Meyer addresses the concept of UDL and its practical application in the classroom. [www.cast.org/teachingeverystudent/ideas/tes](http://www.cast.org/teachingeverystudent/ideas/tes)
- CAST is a non-profit research and development organization that works to expand learning opportunities for all individuals through Universal Design for Learning. [www.cast.org/udl/index.html](http://www.cast.org/udl/index.html)
- The *National Center on UDL* supports the effective implementation of UDL by connecting stakeholders in the field and providing resources and information. [www.udlcenter.org](http://www.udlcenter.org)
- *A Journey Towards Creating an Inclusive Classroom: How Universal Design for Learning has Transformed My Teaching* This article describes one teacher's journey towards creating an inclusive classroom and how Universal Design for Learning has transformed his teaching at the University of Ontario. [www.kpu.ca/sites/default/files/Teaching%20and%20Learning/TD.4.2.5\\_Kumar\\_Inclusive\\_Classroom.pdf](http://www.kpu.ca/sites/default/files/Teaching%20and%20Learning/TD.4.2.5_Kumar_Inclusive_Classroom.pdf)

## Alberta Examples

The following Alberta school authorities are among those who have developed staff resources on universal design for learning:

- *Medicine Hat School District*—This school authority has developed an interactive *Toolbox for an Inclusive Classroom*, including information on universal design for learning. [www.inclusiontoolbox.com/universal-design-for-learning#!\\_universal-design-for-learning](http://www.inclusiontoolbox.com/universal-design-for-learning#!_universal-design-for-learning)
- *Edmonton Public Schools*—The video, [Westglen School, K-6: Universal Design for Learning](#), part of the *Inclusive Learning: Everyone's In* video series, describes one school's journey to meet student learning needs through the principles of UDL. See also: [www.epsb.ca/media/epsb/ourdistrict/topicsofinterest/LearningGuide\\_2013.pdf](http://www.epsb.ca/media/epsb/ourdistrict/topicsofinterest/LearningGuide_2013.pdf)
- *Edmonton Learning Regional Consortium*—In this video, consultant Karen Pedersen-Bayus, , shares the principles of UDL as seen in action in various grade levels and classrooms in one inclusive school environment. [http://inclusiveeducationpdresources.com/udl/udl\\_in\\_action.php](http://inclusiveeducationpdresources.com/udl/udl_in_action.php)

