

# Learner variability

A suggestion for implementing the strategy

'Find out about UDL' from the Guide:

[Universal Design for Learning](#)

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Inclusive Education

From

Guide: [Universal Design for Learning](#)

Strategy: [Find out about UDL](#)

Suggestion: [Learner variability](#)

Date

29 August 2025

Link

[inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/universal-design-for-learning/learner-variability-matters](https://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/universal-design-for-learning/learner-variability-matters)

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## What is learner variability?

The differences learners bring influence how they learn.

Every learner brings unique and varied experiences, strengths, skills, knowledge and intersecting identities to learning.

They also bring differences in:

- how they are motivated and engage in learning
- how they perceive, access and make sense of information
- how they use tools, take action, express ideas and demonstrate understanding.

Planning with this variability in mind at the outset is central to UDL.

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## Why variability matters

Dr Todd Rose, Harvard University, talks about why planning for variability is critical.



Video hosted on Youtube <http://youtu.be/8WClnVjCEVM>

Closed Captions

Source:

[Cyber Learning \(US\)](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8WClnVjCEVM>

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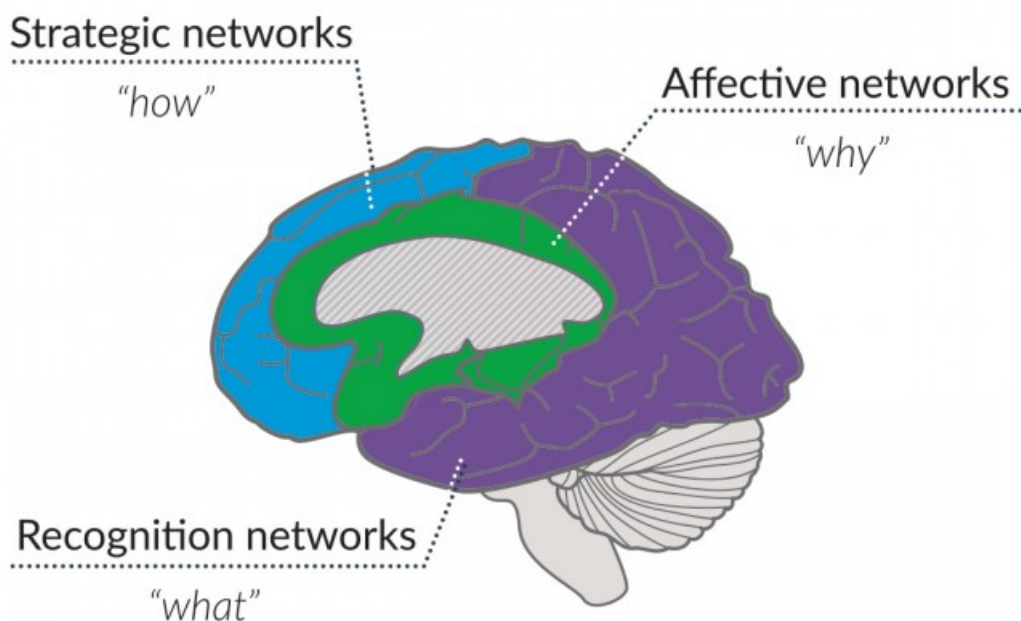
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## Variability and the learning brain



Source:

[UDL and the Learning Brain | CAST](#)

<https://www.cast.org/products-services/resources/2018/udl-learning-brain-neuroscience>

[View full image \(140 KB\)](#)

## Planning for predictable variability

UDL helps us consider variability across four dimensions.

It helps us think about the "why", "how", "what" and "who" of learning ([CAST, 2024](#)).

UDL has traditionally emphasised the variability among learners in:

- **engagement** – the "**why**" of learning (how they engage with learning)
- **representation** – the "**what**" of learning (how they perceive information)
- **action and expression** – the "**how**" of learning (how they act on and express what they know).

[UDL Guidelines 3.0](#) expands this view to include: Identity – the "**who**" of learning:

- Recognising that learners bring multiple, intersecting identities (for example, cultural, linguistic, racial, gender-based).
- Acknowledging that identities shape how learners engage with, perceive, and express their learning.

Note: Identity is not a separate category but is interwoven across all three UDL principles.

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## Useful resources



### UDL and the Learning Brain

Read time: 5 min

A rationale for UDL based on findings from neuroscience.

Publisher: CAST (2024)

[Visit website](#)



### Research@Work: Embracing Learner Variability in Schools

Read time: 2 min

In this video, David Rose discusses the importance of providing learning supports and structures that are tailored to students' individual needs and abilities. He shares his vision for “de-standardizing” education to help students discover their strengths and become expert learners.

Publisher: Digital Promise

[Visit website](#)

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