

# Why UDL is valuable

An introduction to UDL and its value in an Aotearoa New Zealand context.

## Enables equity in education

Providing high quality education is a matter of social justice.

A foundation principle of *The New Zealand Curriculum* is inclusion: that no-one will be left out or discriminated against. That everyone will have access to learning in a way that works for them.

As every student learns differently, schools must create flexible, barrier-free learning environments if all students are to become successful, lifelong learners.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can help schools and kura design learning environments that are flexible, and where there are no barriers in the way. It is a framework that enables equitable access and participation in education.

## Supports a shift in practice

The UDL framework supports teachers to make the shift from traditional models of education to approaches that value and are prepared for the variability all learners bring.

Without a systematic way to interrupt current practice in the classroom the impact of these barriers is repeatedly faced by each generation without significant forward motion to break the cycle once & for all.

**Bae, S., Ofiesh, N. S., & Blackorby, J. (2018)**

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# Values and plans for diversity

Understanding and planning for the variability of learners matters.

One-size-fits-all thinking can create barriers and the "myth of the average learner" has excluded many students from realising their potential.

When we design learning environments **proactively** for variability, we anticipate and value the incredible strengths and diversity of all our learners (CAST 2018). UDL can help us do this.



Video hosted on Youtube <http://youtu.be/RYtUIU8MjIY>

Shelley Moore uses a great analogy to describe why planning for diversity and learner variability is good for everyone.

Closed Captions

**Source:**

[SSHRC-CRSH \(Canada\)](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCn4lSk-Vdb8Q3oE9IJn9R2Q>

# Everyone benefits

When UDL is implemented intentionally across a school or Kāhui Ako it can bring coherence to teaching practices that are inclusive of all learners. This approach benefits everyone.

**Students** can be confident they will have:

- equitable access to learning opportunities
- the tools and supports they need to demonstrate their learning in ways that work for them across all classes
- responsive teachers who welcome their self-advocacy and seek feedback on their teaching
- knowledgeable teachers who value and have an understanding of learner variability.

**Whānau** can trust that:

- their ideas and questions will be welcomed
- the uniqueness of their child will be valued and seen as a source of strength for the community
- the learning needs of their child will be met
- their child will not be singled out or separated from their peers.

**Teachers** have a framework to guide decision-making. It supports them to:

- identify and minimise barriers to learning and wellbeing hidden in their teaching
- consider how to offer useful options and supports that can be built into the learning environment at the outset
- problem solve with colleagues, students and whānau using the shared language of UDL.

**Leaders** have a framework that will:

- support their growth and development as an inclusive school
- support consistent, coherent inclusive teaching and learning practices across their school
- guide the design of more inclusive systems and processes, community events and building projects
- provide a shared language that can be used with all stakeholders, across all contexts.

Source: Chrissie Butler.

## A culturally inclusive framework

Although UDL has been developed in the US, it resonates for us here in Aotearoa.

UDL takes a people-first approach to planning learning. It asks us to think about **who** we will teach and what those learners bring with them **before** we think about **what** we will teach.

UDL is focussed on ensuring all learners get a chance to learn in ways that work for them. It is about removing barriers and opening doors to learning. It is driven not only by the findings from neuroscience and educational research but by a vision for equity.

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UDL has allowed people to see inequity in places and spaces where they hadn't considered it before. That has given us a doorway to talk about inequities for Māori.

**Janelle Riki-Waaka**

Source:

CORE Education

<https://www.core-ed.org/>

## Summary

The UDL framework helps us:

- build our understanding of learner variability and its implications for teaching and learning
- identify and remove barriers to learning hidden in the way we routinely do things
- move away from random well-intentioned acts of inclusion
- collaborate and work together using a shared language and evidenced-based approaches
- guides deliberate coherent innovation in inclusive design
- realise our vision for *The New Zealand Curriculum* and inclusive schools.

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