

# Chapter 1

## What Is UDL?

**Marlena Jenkins**  
*University of North Florida, USA*

### **ABSTRACT**

*Chapter 1 serves as a foundational introduction to universal design for learning (UDL), an educational framework that seeks to accommodate the diverse needs of all learners. This chapter lays the groundwork for understanding UDL's principles, its purpose, and its significance in creating inclusive and effective learning environments. By establishing a comprehensive understanding of UDL, subsequent chapters can dive into specific applications and contexts without the need to reintroduce the concept. This approach ensures an in-depth exploration of UDL's multifaceted impact on education, allowing readers to fully grasp how it can be integrated across various educational settings and disciplines.*

### **MAKING A MOUNTAIN OUT OF A MOLEHILL**

*“Learning is more about uncovering something new about how we think, communicate, and replicate knowledge and less about affirming what we already know.” - M. Jenkins*

I am convinced that many of the problems we face pertaining to how we attempt to get things done are because of our own doing or undoing. Within the educational sector alone, there are an unlimited number of ways that students, teachers, administrators, families, support personnel, employees, and guests interact with each other and the physical environment on a daily basis. During these often-mundane occurrences, we take for granted how background knowledge, lived experience, relationships, and comfortability support the making of a “can do” or a “try-try again” outlook. It is only until we are in a place of doubt or have something to overcome that we

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-1269-8.ch001

recognize the impact of the preparatory structures in place meant to nudge us across the finish line. Ask yourself, “Am I prone to giving in at the slightest sign of difficulty?” or “Do I press beyond the doorstep to the point of no return?” One factor that predicts your ability to persevere to such drastic extents is your ability to identify and overcome barriers. You see a hurdle (literally or figuratively), and you immediately think of using a step stool to hop over rather than skinning your knee and jumping the great vertical distance.

Within this chapter and throughout this entire text, you will uncover a resource, more specifically a mindset, that proves layer by layer as one of the leading solutions to many of the individual, organizational, and environmental struggles presented within professional, technological, and educational realms. Universal Design for Learning, which in its common form is simply known as UDL, represents the art of planning, analyzing, and proactive solution development as a means of prevention before insurmountable problems arise. UDL is not something you can do; it is something you first believe and internalize and thus are continually focused on applying to all situations, great or small. So grab your highlighters, notepads, graphic organizers, fidgets, beverages, snacks of choice, and happy reading.

## **Setting the Stage for Future Learning**

*“Learning is a constant process of discovery- a process without end.” - Bruce Lee*

Humor me for a moment before I am forced to get too serious and straight to the point as I take you back in time to two places. In one, you are a 5-year-old who is making their first PB & J. In the second, you are a first-year college student struggling to navigate the campus in order to find your lecture hall. For your 5-year-old self, this is likely before the birth of Uncrustables®. This was a time when you had to take out a good old-fashioned butter knife and open a non-squeezable jar to make a PB&J. The process was messy but so enjoyable because you were practicing newly acquired skills, and the reinforcement tasted delicious. The college “you” is excitedly nervous and working hard to master the so-called art of adulting. You hustle across campus, skimming building signs and searching for someone who looks as though they are not in the same sinking boat as you. After finding the auditorium, you enter a space with at least 100 students, none of whom you know, but you follow gestures and equally awkward facial expressions until you make it to the end of an empty row 10 steps up. Just as you bend to sit, you are redirected down to the first 5 rows by the professor.

After each of those experiences, you gained valuable insight into how you navigate yourself and your surroundings under some level of stress or anticipation. Your next sandwich is less torn, and the counter less sticky. The next semester is not as hectic

10 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: [www.igi-global.com/chapter/what-is-udl/342186](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/what-is-udl/342186)

## Related Content

---

### Management Education Collaboration Networks

Owen P. Halland Kenneth D. Ko (2014). *International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design* (pp. 1-16).

[www.irma-international.org/article/management-education-collaboration-networks/119666](http://www.irma-international.org/article/management-education-collaboration-networks/119666)

### Multi-Disciplinary Collaboration to Unravel Expert Knowledge: Designing for Effective Human-Computer Interaction

Elspeth McKay and Jennifer Martin (2007). *Instructional Design: Case Studies in Communities of Practice* (pp. 309-329).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/multi-disciplinary-collaboration-unravel-expert/23959](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/multi-disciplinary-collaboration-unravel-expert/23959)

### Updating and Developing Course Materials

Lynnette R. Porter (2004). *Developing an Online Curriculum: Technologies and Techniques* (pp. 77-114).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/updating-developing-course-materials/8249](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/updating-developing-course-materials/8249)

### Cultivating Critical Thinking Skills in Online Course Environments: Instructional Techniques and Strategies

Curtis L. Todd, Kokila Ravi and Kenja McCray (2019). *International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design* (pp. 19-37).

[www.irma-international.org/article/cultivating-critical-thinking-skills-in-online-course-environments/216929](http://www.irma-international.org/article/cultivating-critical-thinking-skills-in-online-course-environments/216929)

### EFL Teachers' Perspectives on Leveraging Tertiary Learners' Collaborative Learning via Translanguaging: Toward Inclusive Language Education

Tu Minh Nguyen (2025). *Differentiated Instruction, Equity, and Inclusion in Language Education* (pp. 69-96).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/efl-teachers-perspectives-on-leveraging-tertiary-learners-collaborative-learning-via-translanguaging/364630](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/efl-teachers-perspectives-on-leveraging-tertiary-learners-collaborative-learning-via-translanguaging/364630)