

# To Cultural Inclusivity and Beyond with Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Published 11/18/2022 by [Ashley Ribbel](#)

[View all the Teaching & Learning Centre Spark Plugs!](#)

**by Sherri Parkins, Learning Strategist in Accessibility Services and Faculty Development Advisor in the Teaching & Learning Centre**

Perhaps you have heard the phrase “To Infinity... and beyond!”? When we look at cultural inclusiveness and consider UDL principles, can we envision how we can go “beyond” in our courses?

So what is culturally inclusive teaching? Culturally inclusive teaching is examining our learning environment and content, whether face-to-face or online, to ensure that all students, no matter their age, ethnicity, religious affiliations, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, or political beliefs feel their contributions are valued and the ability to engage is inclusive.

Like the uniqueness of each star in the universe, each student has a unique connectome being created as they continue to learn (Rose, 2015).



Image credit: [NIH Image Gallery](#) from Flickr (CC BY-NC 2.0)

Acknowledging this diversity is critical in culturally responsive teaching. Providing opportunities for students to hear stories and listen to others can honour Indigenous ways of learning. Opportunities to watch videos can support those whose strengths lay in processing information more visually. Providing different ways for students to explore new content can support those who can't make it to class due to family situations or if their mode of transportation has been impacted. These ideas are reflected in the UDL principle of

## Multiple Means of Representation.

Neuroscience informs and UDL respects that for students to learn they need to feel safe. For some students, their educational experiences may not have included feeling safe. Engaging in learning can feel risky. Establishing your learning environment as a safe place can have an enormous impact on student's ability to engage. Share with students how they can connect with you. Try a "How's it going?" to a few students each week. This could be a short video or audio instead of text. Remember the icebreakers we did in the first class when it feels like we start to establish connections? Consider doing a brief activity like this throughout the term. Have a look at [Thought Catalogue](#) or [Iowa State's 226 Active Learning Techniques](#) for some inspiration. Offering students different ways to participate in class can lower the risk factor. Don't throw aside polling tools where we can engage in some quick formative assessment using tools like [Mentimeter](#) because your class is meeting face-to-face. Some students will attempt to answer when there is anonymity involved. Ideas like this embrace UDL's principle of [Multiple Means of Engagement](#).

UDL considers that not all students demonstrate knowledge to the best of their abilities in the same way. When considering ways for students to demonstrate competency in a course, we also want to consider if the assessment is authentic. Is there a task they can do other than a written test? Watch this video for some ideas!

## Designing Assessments for an Intercultural Class



You can also refer to this document that ties [Bloom's Taxonomy to the principle of Multiple Means of Action and Expression](#). The potential to employ [Multiple Means of Action and Expression](#) into assessment is exciting!!

As you approach the idea of Cultural Inclusivity and going beyond with UDL remember; like any journey of discovery, the journey starts with small steps!

## **References and Additional Materials**

James, K. (2018) "Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a Structure for Culturally Responsive Practice," Northwest Journal of Teacher Education: Vol. 13 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.

Rose, D, CAST. (2015) Universal Design in Education Conference Keynote Speech.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=shsfhDqZ1ss&ab\\_channel=UniversalDesign](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=shsfhDqZ1ss&ab_channel=UniversalDesign)

Universal Design for Learning: Inspiring Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education:  
<https://udlontario.georgebrown.ca/>

Designing And Developing High Quality Student Centred Online Hybrid Learning Experiences:  
The Principles of Inclusion & Diversity:  
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/qualitycourses/chapter/the-principles-of-inclusion-diversity/>

8 Aboriginal Ways of Learning: <https://www.8ways.online/>

**[View all the Teaching & Learning Centre Spark Plugs!](#)**

tags : inclusion, inclusive-design, spark-plug, teaching, teaching-and-learning, teaching-and-learning-centre, udl, universal-design-for-learning