

# Translating UDL: An Aotearoa/New Zealand Story

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## Abstract

*Imagine the global implementation of UDL as the making of a cloak of many woven strands. This presentation will map one strand in the evolution of UDL in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Using resources and materials made during this journey, an overview of how an approach developed in the United States can have relevance and be a positive enabler for inclusion across cultures and continents, will be presented.*

## Keywords

Authenticity, culture, relevance, value, Aotearoa (Indigenous word for New Zealand).

## INTRODUCTION

Over the last five years, the education system in Aotearoa/New Zealand, particularly for primary and secondary schools, has been undergoing a period of unprecedented change (Bolstad et al. 2012). Some of these changes, such as the inclusion of digital technologies in teaching and learning and the move away from single classrooms to flexible learning environments, have created opportunities to introduce educators to Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

However, as facilitators in inclusive education and advocates of UDL, we have found ourselves in a challenging situation. We immediately see the value UDL can bring to our national education system. We envision how UDL can support the widespread design of barrier-free, flexible learning environments, rich in options and supports where every learner has access to learning in a way that works for them.

Yet in our work teaching about inclusivity, we quickly hit a wall. The UDL story didn't translate easily. Educators were not able to see the relevance of UDL to teaching and learning in Aotearoa/New Zealand and were distracted by differences in terminology and context.

In response, guided by CAST's UDL Guidelines (2018), we have embarked on a journey of translating UDL for our unique context. This journey is analogous to the weaving of a mat of many strands, a metaphor with deep relevance to indigenous Māori ways of knowing and being. This presentation highlights one of those strands – our shared endeavour to increase the relevance, value and authenticity of UDL for our national educator community whilst maintaining the integrity of the UDL framework.

## OUR KETE (BASKET) OF LEARNINGS

### UDL: A People-Centred Framework

One of the most significant milestones of this journey to “translating UDL” is the positioning of UDL as a people-centred framework. In Aotearoa, from an indigenous perspective, establishing connections between people, past and present, is of primary importance

For example, a culturally responsive way to begin any workshop is for the host to introduce themselves. This oral introduction has a protocol called *mihimihi*. When the host speaks, they will often include their family connections past and present, their connections to geographical areas of importance, and their name. One purpose of *mihimihi* is to create an opportunity where people in the room can make connections between each other.

As a facilitator, *mihimihi* also offered an opportunity to illustrate how taking a UDL approach could strengthen the goal of making connections. By following an oral *mihimihi*, with a set of slides showing photos of the people and places in our *mihimihi*, we could offer a second way to make connection – a multiple means of representation to increase access and understanding.

A Māori colleague, Beth Dixon, referred to the approach as a kind of “digital mihi” and it became one of the first home-grown examples of UDL in action in an authentically Aotearoa/New Zealand context. It was also an example that others could easily develop and share and is now widely used in multiple contexts.

### People-Centred Materials

As facilitators we have found that if the people-centred narrative is not explicit, there is no foundation from which to build trust or make meaning.

In response, we try to keep the people visible both in our facilitation and teaching approaches but also, where possible, in our materials.

A tentative first graphic example of this people-centred approach came with the re-positioning of CAST's (2004) Planning for All Learners cycle (PAL)(See Figure 1).

Essentially the PAL cycle should have translated easily to the Aotearoa context with a few tweaks to the language. It strongly aligns with our own Teaching as Inquiry approaches (Ministry of Education, 2007, p.35) and also emphasizes the need for approaches to be learner-centred. However, it wasn't until we made explicit, “Start with the people, who are they, what do they bring, what is their

context, what is important to them right now?”, that we began to see traction.

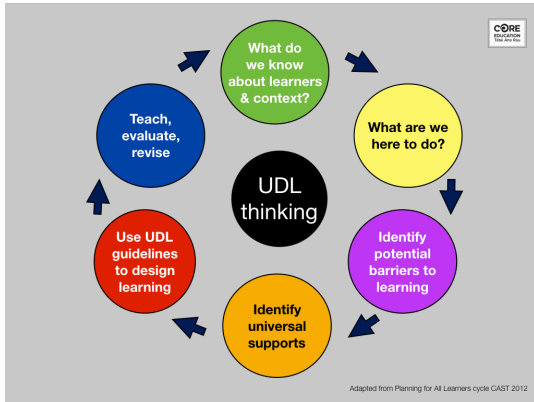


Figure 1. UDL Thinking

### Explicit Connections to Culture

Another opportunity to increase value and authenticity came with the adaptation of Novak’s (2014) analogy of how to plan a meal for a group of strangers. In Aotearoa, the hosting of guests to make them feel welcome is of high value. In the Māori language it has its own word, *Manaakitanga*, which can be translated as “the process of showing respect, generosity and care for others” (Moorfield 2018). In the context of a cultural competency for educators in Aotearoa/New Zealand, *Manaakitanga* also means “showing integrity, sincerity and respect towards Māori beliefs, language and culture” (Ministry of Education, 2011, p.4).



Figure 2. Universal Design for Eating

In workshops when we share the meal analogy, we make explicit connection to the practice of *Manaakitanga*. We emphasise how the aim is to make all feel welcome. We express that the practice is also about courtesy and showing respect for others. We also invite educators to think about how they can take this practice of *Manaakitanga*

into the classroom. We suggest that UDL can help us do that.

We also aim to illustrate this storytelling with pictures that resonate. We strive to take every opportunity to build connection so people can quickly recognise themselves, their learners and their communities (see Figure 2).

### ILLUSTRATING UDL

Alongside our facilitation work, we have curated and developed UDL materials on behalf of our Ministry of Education for their Inclusive Education: Guides for Schools website. Most recently, we had an opportunity to illustrate the UDL Guidelines with stories and examples of practice from local schools, supported by international content. At this stage, many of the stories used are examples of where teacher practice already aligns with the UDL Guidelines. However, we are beginning to document stories of deliberate and ongoing implementation of UDL.

We have also contributed to the first official articulations of the relationship between *The New Zealand Curriculum* and UDL in the design and development of the video, UDL and the NZC (Ministry of Education, 2016). In the video, the Ministry of Education (2016) positions UDL as follows:

*Universal Design for Learning can help us realize the vision for the New Zealand Curriculum. It supports us to design respectful, inclusive environments where everyone is learning and achieving, and diversity is a source of strength.*

### CONCLUSION

Our woven cloak of UDL is slowly taking shape in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Already it has many strands and many educators and researchers are innovating, exploring and implementing UDL in their contexts.

This presentation shares but one strand, a perspective informed by our own experiences and opportunities. Hopefully in the future, we can begin to take a research lens to this national journey. Until then, we continue to weave.

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