

Collaborating around Universal Design for Learning: From policy to practice

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A team of 19 academic, professional and Equity and Diversity staff at Deakin University worked collaboratively and inclusively to design, deliver, and evaluate a reworked 'Introduction to university study' unit, incorporating Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles. The curriculum redevelopment aimed to create an inclusive and engaging foundation unit for commencing undergraduate students, utilising the best resources and support from the Library, Student Life and the Faculty of Arts & Education. This presentation discusses the nature of the inter-divisional collaboration in each of the three phases and the outcomes of the redevelopment for students, as indicated in unit evaluation data. It also critically analyses the effectiveness of UDL as a set of principles for curriculum design and evaluation in higher education, based on both the evaluation data and the development-delivery-evaluation team's experience.

This study reports on the evaluation of the redeveloped unit delivered across three campuses and online, with more than 300 students and 6 teaching staff in terms of the extent to which application of UDL principles enhanced student learning and engagement in the unit. Methods included (quantitative) analysis of student results, success rates and eVALUate data; and (qualitative) focus groups, surveys, responses to a reflective exam question and teacher/support staff interviews. Data indicated the UDL-focused redesign with cross-divisional teaching improved student performance markedly and in particular had helped students develop key transition-to-university skills. The improvements in student success rates, notably of those in the target equity groups, suggest that the many ways in which UDL principles were applied in this unit enhanced student learning. However, the team also found that students' preferences do not always match UDL recommendations.

The UDL framework encapsulated many (but not all) of the various team-members' pre-existing beliefs about good quality, inclusive curriculum design and teaching practice for commencing university students. However, tensions arose as partners negotiated pedagogical principles and the practicalities of applying UDL in a higher education context. This made it an awkward tool for guiding curriculum development, and for framing evaluation. The long-term inter-divisional

collaboration around the unit, project-managed by Equity and Diversity, was however an overwhelming success. Student results and comments indicated they had benefited from the direct involvement of professional staff in the materials development and teaching. The partners noted significant developments in their understanding of each other's theoretical backgrounds and ways of working.