# 1.7 The One About Universal Design for Learning

[00:00:00] **Mandy:** [00:00:00] Hi Wayne and Becky, how are you today?

**Becky:** [00:00:02] Good. How are you, Mandy?

**Mandy:** [00:00:04] Good.

**Becky:** [00:00:05] All right.

**Mandy:** [00:00:07] It is recording. We are recording. Today, Becky, you're gonna share with us some information about universal design for learning.

**Becky:** [00:00:18] Yes, I am. I'm really excited about this. I love universal design. it just gives you so many options for education. One of the first questions that comes up is what is universal design for learning.

Universal design for learning is how we approach teaching and learning so that we can customize curriculum. And that gives all of the learners the opportunity to succeed. We set up a blueprint to design those strategies, the materials, the assessments, the tools, everything that we need to use, to teach our learners that have many diverse needs.

I am not specifically talking about just students that maybe are on an IEP or a 504. [00:01:00] Universal design for learning tries to address all learners, not just those learners that have the special needs that we might be aware of.

Things like culture, things like the language that they speak. they can have physical disabilities, things like that. this is over encompassing though, this isn't just for disabled people or people with learning disabilities, it's over everybody. This is something that for everybody to be able to learn and to be able to learn better, there's not any one approach to it.

There's a variety of methods that we use to remove those barriers to learning and gives that opportunity for all learners to be successful. So that's really what universal design for learning is. Do you guys have any questions yet?

**Wayne:** [00:01:51] I didn't know, before we started this and I just wanted to kind of make sure. I know a little bit about universal design in general, like the [00:02:00] concept or principles, but I didn't really know if that was like directly related to education.

So, can you speak to that a little bit? Like, is this exactly the same or is this the kind of specialized for one.

**Becky:** [00:02:14] It's not exactly the same. It is based on the same idea of universal design for everybody on making things accessible to everybody. But UDL specifically goes towards learning .

And it's actually built on three main principles and we can look at those principles as the what, how, and why of universal learning. First we'll talk about the "what" and the "what" is representation.  You want to offer the information in multiple different formats.

Offer different ways for students to perceive the information you're trying to give them, and this will allow them different opportunities for comprehension. For example, [00:03:00] say you're reading To Kill a Mockingbird in your English class, you could provide students with a print version of the book, they can be provided with an electronic version of the book and where that benefits them is they can change the contrast, change the size of the text, multiple different things with the digital version versus just a print version, watching the video, having an audio book so it's read to them and they even make braille books for people who are not able to see.

That main principle of representation is making sure that there's multiple ways for them to consume whatever kind of information you're trying to get.

**Wayne:** [00:03:38] Can I ask a question about that one?

I had two thoughts as you were talking about that one is if you're providing multiple resources to the students, to use your example, like it's a book, that may cost something, are you suggesting that you're giving the students different options for obtaining the book? Like in higher ed or they [00:04:00] typically have to get something like that on their own, where you're giving them the options of you can go this route, this route or this route.

Because, I could see in other places where that would be cost prohibitive. Maybe if we are providing those materials to provide multiple types of the same thing, does that mean, is there, do you know anything about that? Is there a way around that?

Do you only use things that are in the creative commons or old enough that they're just free?

**Becky:** [00:04:32] Well, I will say, I will do a plug for OER, you know, that is one thing. Open educational resources are huge.  I try to use them in my courses, because there is so much information out there in multiple different formats that does not cost anything. I really do think we should use that, but you make a really good point because if you look historically at even k-12 or higher ed and we have a student who  is blind. We would [00:05:00] want to offer that student like an audio text so that they can hear it or a braille text so that they can read using braille , but you do have a cost obviously To Kill a Mockingbird is not free. And to get it in these other formats is not free. That's going to cost money. And so generally when you have a student who is on an IEP or a 504 or needs some sort of accommodation like that, the school's disability services are gonna pay for those products.

But when we're looking at universal design, we're looking at it from the perspective of this is to benefit everybody, not just those students who have identified needs. So, that's a good point and I don't know that I have a solution or an answer to the cost prohibitiveness of it, other than that, there is a ton of free stuff out on the internet.

So for the most part, we can find stuff free. That's a really good point, Wayne.

**Wayne:** [00:05:53] Thank you.  And then, the other thing I was thinking that is that in our learning management system, Brightspace, we [00:06:00] pay for read speakers. And it, it works for all kinds of documents and content where the instructors don't really have to do anything differently with their written content.

They can upload a word doc, a PDF type it in, you know, HTML, content, whatever. But does that kind of go along with that as well? That it provides another option and another method and other mode for the student to absorb that material?

**Becky:** [00:06:26] Absolutely. Absolutely. And the fact that the school pays for that for all students just goes to show the universal design is available for all students.

because yeah, I think that that's a perfect example of if you upload a PDF of the text that you want them to read, they have that they can print it off so they can have a print version it's uploaded. So it's a digital copy. And with the text to speech, the reader that's built into the LMS there.

You now have the audio version too.

**Wayne:** [00:06:56] Okay. I was just curious if that really.

**Becky:** [00:06:59] Yeah that's [00:07:00] a great question and a great example.

The next principle I want to talk about is action and expression and action and expression is the "how" principle. It's "how do you offer the material to them"?

How do the students or learners interact with the material and how do they show what they've learned? With action and expression, you want to make sure that there's, again, multiple ways for the students to interact with that material and for them to present that material to you, to express what they've learned.

I'll just go back to this To Kill a Mockingbird, because that is what my daughter's learning about right now in school and so that's on the top of my head, but say a student is learning To Kill a Mockingbird and you want to assess where they're at, what they've done.

If they've learned what they're supposed to be learning. And this is where we step in and say, let's give this students and choice, let's give them the option. Maybe some students will do better with a written test. [00:08:00] Maybe some students do better with an oral presentation where they can just get up and talk about how wonderful the book was .

Because it is wonderful in case anyone wondered. And they have that option. They can do a group project. At my daughter's school, for example, I have to give her English teacher credit for her action and expression when it comes to universal design, because she allows the students to have multiple different options for turning in their assignments to show what they've learned.

When they learn about utopia, dystopia, when they're reading those different books, how they present it  is the universal design, but they have to create their own dystopia or utopia.

They have to make a webpage for it and they can make advertisements and they can sell things and they can make a government.

There are just so many different ways that they can show that they understand what a utopia or a dystopia is, and it's super fun. So there's that action and expression to really get [00:09:00] different ways for students to show what knowledge they have.

And then the final principle is engagement. And this is the "why," "why are we having them learn this"?

And again, allow student choice, create opportunities for movement, multiple means of engagement for the students. We'll go back to English class again. If you're doing Shakespeare, act out the play, have students actually stand at the front of the classroom and pretend that they are those different actors or the different people in the play. By having students do that, they're more engaged.

They're more apt to learn the material and remember the material and they're having fun while they're doing it. And they're moving. Movement is a big part of engagement.

**Mandy:** [00:09:43] Becky, I have a question for you. It seems like the concept of universal design for learning is beyond the idea of learning styles.

I know that I've read and heard some things about how learning styles are kind of being [00:10:00] debunked. Do you think that universal design is the next step beyond considering learning styles, because you're really trying to make sure that you're serving all students diverse needs instead of trying to put students in those boxes, like learning styles kind of do, what are your thoughts on that?

**Becky:** [00:10:19] That's a really good question. And that's a really good point. And I do, I think universal design can pull us from this idea of like you said, a box, because as I'm sure you guys know, most people aren't one particular learning style. It depends on what they're learning. It depends on what their background knowledge for the subject is, their interest. There's so many things that can alter a person's learning style.

As educators when we get so caught up in making sure we're matching what we're doing to the learning style for the students, it almost feels like you are creating [00:11:00] lessons for 10 different people, right? We want to accomplish one thing, but I have to specifically do 10 different things to reach each of these students individually.

And it's impossible. I mean, that is just impossible unless we have all the time in the world and we don't. So universal design for learning takes that view of every different learning style is different. So let's create something that allows for all those different learning styles to come out.

I guess I've never actually thought of it that way, Mandy, with saying, learning styles aren't important, because they are, but I think universal design offers the flexibility to capture all those different learning styles but only have to do one lesson.

But I've never really thought of it that way, but that's a great point though. I do like that. If I haven't confused everybody or totally lost you.

**Mandy:** [00:11:58] No, I think what [00:12:00] I was hearing is that basically, if we're only looking at learning styles, when we're trying to plan a lesson or plan curricula, we might be actually excluding students , or not taking into account other needs because we're so focused on just those learning styles or those learning preferences.

Whereas with universal design, it's more like we are recognizing that students have different preferences for learning, but also have other needs. And there's other contexts that will support that. I think what maybe you were also getting at is that when, if you're really trying to plan instruction around learning styles, you might feel like you have to do a really specific thing for people who are auditory learners or people who are kinesthetic learners, whereas if you're doing universal design, [00:13:00] you're taking that all into account and then giving it back to the students and saying, "How do you want to represent your learning?" Instead of saying, "Hey, auditory people, this is what you're going to do, kinesthetic people, this is what you're going to do instead you're putting it all together and saying, alright, you know what is going to work best for you as a learner, how do you want to represent that learning, and giving them that opportunity to do that.

**Becky:** [00:13:28] Exactly your end goal is the same for everybody, how you reach that end goal. And what it looks like is going to look different for different people, but it's still important to know what that goal is and to reflect on reaching that same goal.

**Mandy:** [00:13:46] Perfect. So tell us more about how to plan. If we're going to plan using universal design for learning, what does that look like?

**Becky:** [00:13:54] I'm happy to tell you about that. When you're getting ready to plan, you need to [00:14:00] ask yourself three questions related to those three main principles. Number one, how will learners engage with this lesson. Engaging, in my opinion, is one of the most important part of any lesson, because if they're not engaged, then they're checked out. If you're, not engaged with the material, then are you really retaining any information? Are you really learning it?

You're not. You might memorize for the sake of memorization. But that engagement piece is really super important. Ask yourself how will learners engage and make sure you provide options so that all the learners have some control, they can regulate their own learning.

They can sustain the effort that they need and you can motivate them as their external motivation for them to keep them engaged, and find ways to keep them interested. When you're designing that lesson, ask yourself, am I going to keep their interest?

Are they going to be engaged? Another key question is how is the information presented to the learners? So you really want to know, does the [00:15:00] information provide options that are going to allow for the learners to reach higher levels of comprehension and understanding? Does it provide options for them to understand the different symbols and expressions that you're trying to present that information to them in.

And do they perceive what needs to be learned? How are your learners perceiving what they need when you have that goal set? Do they understand what they need to do what that end goal is. And then just make sure that you think about how learners are expected to act strategically and express themselves.

When I say act strategically, if they have so much work to get done in a limited time to do it, do they have the ability to do the time management to complete that? Can they express themselves in a fluent manner and in a way that they are able to express themselves so that you understand them and so that they understand what your expectations are and what the final project should be.

That's really just the key questions, [00:16:00] which again, relates back to those three main principles of representation, action, and expression and engagement.

**Mandy:** [00:16:07] I guess I'm trying to think about this from a planning standpoint. We've talked about using the learning goals for the class or the learning goals for the unit or whatever, and working backwards. We've talked a little bit about backward design in different contexts. I'm just trying to think of my own experience planning instruction for my students. At what point am I thinking about universal design?

Am I thinking about it from the get go, or am I doing my backwards design from the learning outcomes? And then when I get to the assessment part, am I looking at universal design? Or where does this happen in that planning process?

**Becky:** [00:16:49] The entire process, you should really be thinking about universal design. When you're looking at what you're going to offer, and it goes back to those three main principles again. If we're doing backwards [00:17:00] design, we know what those goals are that we want to reach at the end. So how do we do that? So each piece of that as you're building that you've got to think about, okay, are there multiple ways for my students to access this information?

Are there multiple ways for them to absorb this information? And then when you're looking at what your assessment is going to be or what tools you're going to use in that lesson, are there a variety of different options for students to reflect on what they've learned for them to tell you or to show you what they've learned?

So really throughout the entire process, you really want to be thinking about universal design in each step, regardless of whether you do backwards design or how you design your lessons, everything you do you should question, does this fit? Will this help everybody? Options are the biggest part of it. Make sure you have options.

**Wayne:** [00:17:53] That sounds awesome.

**Becky:** [00:17:56] So why don't I give you guys some examples of what [00:18:00] UDL looks like in the classroom? Some things as an instructor that you can do to use universal design in your classroom. Number one, post the lesson goals and refer to them throughout the lesson, these are what the objectives are. This is what you should be able to do at the end of it.

You want to make sure your students know what those goals are and sometimes even have them help you write goals. That's a really good wait for them to try to achieve those goals. And as long as you refer to them throughout the lesson, so the students don't get what the point of all of this is. We've talked about assignment options, the choice board, where students, can have one rubric and nine different ways they can complete something and they pick whichever way they want on there.

You could have a written report versus an oral report. Some students may not be able to get up in front of people. Some may prefer to just write an essay. Others may have terrible writing skills, but they do much better if they're standing up and explaining [00:19:00] what they learn. So really make sure that you have different options for the way a student can complete an assignment.

Flexible environments. We like to talk about flexible seating in classrooms, and that is a UDL thing. You want to make sure you have quiet work areas where students that are working individually can have a quiet space to sit and work, have some workspaces that are set up for group work, so that you can have small groups or large groups work together.

Another type of flexible environment is allowing students to wear earbuds or headphones and listen to music while they're working independently. Even as far as the physical part, have bean bag chairs, have desks, have a couch, have different seating options for the students because some kids are more comfortable sitting a certain way than others are.

My daughter's remote learning right now and, talking about COVID stuff, when we started in the spring remote learning, I had a desk and a [00:20:00] workstation and everything set up for her and it was a battle and it didn't work.

And so this fall, when she started, I said, you know what, just do your homework wherever you want. I don't care. Child sits on her bed and does her homework. And she has better grades now than she did last spring. Some kids just work better where they are. And you guys know, I really like to sit cross legged in my chair at work and lean back and type.

So everybody's a little bit different and what works for one may not work for another. So be flexible.

Offer regular feedback. Did they meet their goals? And when I talked about those goals, that's a good way for students as you referred to them throughout. Well, have you done this?

Have you reached this? What do you think? So offer that feedback as you're going. And then another example is like the text options have, have a digital and audio, a print, the text to speech just. Have all the different options of how to consume that product. And that's an example of UDL in the classroom. [00:21:00]

**Mandy:** [00:21:00] I love all of those examples. I'm thinking about what you were just saying about your daughter's experience of being at home and learning to remotely and I'm thinking about what does UDL look like right now? We have a lot of people who are teaching

and learning remotely, we have people who are doing synchronous instruction, asynchronous instruction.

We have some people who are doing a mixed delivery course. Some people are doing high flex models. Some people are not formally following high flex principals but are having some students who are quarantined at home who are participating live remotely in a class.

So given all of the craziness and different models of instruction that we're using right now, what does UDL look like right now in this COVID teaching environment that we're dealing with.

**Becky:** [00:21:58] Honestly, I think [00:22:00] if everything was UDL, it would have made the transitions so much easier to remote learning.

If you look at the idea of  high flex learning, UDL fits perfect in with that high flex, because it's that flexibility. There's no one size fits all for it. This idea of, well, it's a universal, so it works for everyone.

The point of universal design is that there are different things and that you have that flexibility to be different so that it works for everyone. so really honestly, I think it fits perfect in with the COVID teaching and I'm not saying that it's easy. The concept of UDL is such a great concept as far as it sounds like it's going to be so easy to do this and do that and switch. It's not

**Wayne:** [00:22:49] I saw a really great quote that I think fits perfectly. It said, universal design is so simple. That's why it's so complicated.

**Becky:** [00:22:59] That's so [00:23:00] true and I love that, but it is, it is. I think we, we as humans overcomplicate everything.

But, that is really such a good point. We're so used to having way too much work that I think we can't believe when something would be so simple.

**Wayne:** [00:23:15] I think too, you know, thinking back like more of my experience with just universal design and web design and stuff is that there's a lot of thought that goes into how to structure a page.

Or, provide content on the internet. That's just one example. That's the one I have the most experience with, but to provide content that everyone can access. And it's the same thing with the learning. There's just so many other facets that you have to think about some of the, so many other resources and things too.

**Becky:** [00:23:47] Well, and I think too, say you develop your course with UDL and it's ready to go, and it goes great, just because you developed it and it went great. Doesn't mean you're done because [00:24:00] those same things may not work for the next group of students. There will be tweaks that you will have to do.

I mean, we will forever be tweaking education because. That just is the nature of the beast. And, so just remember to like, it's not a one and done kind of thing. And that's the whole

point of universal design is to continually be growing and changing and offering and flexible and not just put something on there, put it out there and let it go.

It's not just boom. You're done and everything will be perfect. That's something to keep in mind also, but it does make transitioning between different modalities, much, much easier.

**Mandy:** [00:24:42] That makes sense, because if you've already planned for that flexibility, and if you've already planned for options for students to choose from to express their learning, then I can see how that would definitely make a much easier transition. It wouldn't be quite so hard.

I [00:25:00] think it requires a really big mindset shift for instructors too, because if you have been teaching a certain way for a long time, and you've developed this model of instruction that you're comfortable with, sometimes that can be really hard to break away from.

A lot of us teach the way that we were taught. And I don't know about you guys, but I was never given options of how to express my learning in school. We're all pretty close to the same age. I think we've all had a similarish experience in our education and universal design was not a thing when we were growing up.

And so I think that it requires some really, really good self reflection and being intentional in your planning, because it's not enough to just say, I give multiple choice tests. That's how I assess my students and they just have to figure out how to do it. [00:26:00] You know, it's, that's not, it's not gonna work.

I was thinking too about are there certain concepts or types of knowledge that just have to be expressed in a specific way. Like I'm thinking about my son who's in elementary school, he's really struggling with his multiplication facts and his teacher last year

and then his teacher this year have both said, he has to memorize these and memorization is a problem for him. If he can sit and draw things out or figure out a different way to solve the problem, he's fine. But if you were to ask him, what's 10 times 12, he is just going to give you a deer in the headlights look because he is not able to easily memorize things like that and then produce those answers.

And so are there types of knowledge that we [00:27:00] can't express differently, that we can't give options for, or is it just something that we haven't thought about yet?

**Becky:** [00:27:08] I think it's something we haven't thought about and I am not an elementary teacher.

I don't ever want to be an elementary teacher and bless them all for what they do. However, I don't agree with memorization of multiplication tables and I'll tell you why. It doesn't encourage higher order thinking at all. I can memorize. I can tell you 10 times 12 is 120, and you know why I know that because I know that I just add a zero to the end of anything that's times 10. I know. I also know what that looks like now, but that if I didn't know why 10 times

12 is 120 that I'm not going to be able to do any more difficult math problems. Right. So memorization doesn't work.

**Wayne:** [00:27:55] I'm not a teacher, but I have children. So that qualifies me to ask [00:28:00] the same and I was a child a long time ago.

The way I feel about something like memorizing the multiplication tables is that, from my kids, several years ago, going through that, that they were learning the concepts of why it's this, but that memorizing the timestables just knowing that, if you could that quickly, you know, just being able to recall it made the things that you were moving forward into that much easier to do. So I felt like both were important. It was important to understand the basic concept of why, but also important,

and not everybody can do it. And I get that too. I'm horrible with stuff like that. If I don't care about it, if I care, then it's all up here forever.

But, am I missing the boat or does that kinda make sense?

**Mandy:** [00:28:51] You're not missing the boat at all. Wayne and I guess that's what made me think about it though, is that the way math is being taught and I'm not trying to pick on math [00:29:00] or common core or anything.

**Wayne:** [00:29:01] No, we can pick on math, it's fine.

**Mandy:** [00:29:03] It's really interesting actually, because when I was helping my son last spring with all of his homework, I was relearning third grade math. I kept thinking, man, I wish I had been taught math this way, because of that conceptual understanding that they're really focusing on.

But then it felt like there was almost a disconnect because here's all of this conceptual knowledge that they're building for kids. Like why do we do it this way? Why does it result in this number when we put these two numbers together? And I thought, Oh my gosh, that's amazing.

But then on the flip side, they're still saying, okay, but, he has to be able to name off the answers to all of these timetables when we ask him and he has to be able to do it in 90 seconds. And I'm like, but you're teaching them to draw pictures and you're teaching this [00:30:00] conceptual knowledge. And, I do think that they go together, but then it feels like, in all of the formative stuff, they're given the opportunity

to practice universal design. So they're given the opportunity to express their understanding in these different ways, but then when it's time to actually be assessed. And I know that it's because this is all working towards standardized testing and, also I think you're right, it does make things easier when they start getting into more difficult concepts for math, especially.

But I'm also kind of like, well, if my kid understands the concept and can demonstrate to you that he gets the concept, let him use a calculator, why does he have to have it memorized?

**Wayne:** [00:30:45] Yeah. You've proven this part. Now you can just do whatever you need to do because you understand how it works.

Right. So you can memorize it if that's easier for you where you can use the calculator or whatever, but you shouldn't have to memorize it if that doesn't work for you. As long as you [00:31:00] understand how it's supposed to work.

**Becky:** [00:31:02] Yeah,

**Wayne:** [00:31:02] I totally agree.  Yeah. 100%,it's like those kids who are really, really good at math and they can do the work in their head without showing their work, but then they get marked off for not showing their work.

If maybe I just have a meeting with you as a student and the parent, and I showed you that I know how to do this in my head. You know, why am I, why do I have to suffer? Because it makes them feel bad. Like, I'm smart enough to do it up here. Why do I have to write it down? Yeah. I've known a few kids like that.

You know, they weren't cheating. They were just good at it.

**Mandy:** [00:31:35] Yeah.

**Becky:** [00:31:36] You know, it's one of those things where the cheaters ruin it for everybody. It really is because I feel the same way. And maybe looking at when we're talking about universal design and looking at that, maybe the concept of contract grading, which is going to come up down the road because Mandy's going to teach us all about it someday, but maybe that

would fall into that too, [00:32:00] because looking at it from an equity versus equality view, so this is worth 20 points and. Do I have kids show their work or do I not? Well, if I don't have them show their work, then I know that they might cheat and still get a good grade. But if I do have them show their work, then all those that don't need to cheat, but also don't need to show their work.

Just got it punished because of the few people who cheated. So it's not, there's no equal there. You're trying to make, because if you don't, if only the ones who. You know, have cheated in the past, have to show your work, then you're picking on them. You know? I think the whole idea of education we need to get away from this. Treating everyone equal, it's not necessarily about that because not everyone has equal needs.

**Mandy:** [00:32:49] You know, I liked what you said about equity versus equality and I think that's kind of what universal design is really getting that is it's making [00:33:00] sure that everybody has the support and the structures and resources they need in order to be successful. That's that equity piece rather than saying, well, everybody gets the same opportunity. That's equality and that's not always gonna work for everybody.

**Becky:** [00:33:20] And I know it's easy for us to sit and say, this is the way it should be, but then I can guarantee you you're going to be sitting in class and you're going to have one or

two that are like, well, that's not fair. How come they get to and I don't. And so then that's why, when we talked about universal design, Offer it to everybody.

And then you don't get that. Well, why did they get it and I didn't get it.

**Mandy:** [00:33:43] Right, right. Well, this has been fascinating. Thanks friends.

**Becky:** [00:33:49] Yes. Thank you. It's an interesting idea.

**Wayne:** [00:33:53] I didn't think I'd have any good questions.

**Becky:** [00:33:55] I agree.

**Mandy:** [00:33:56] Gold star for you.

All right, [00:34:00] guys. Well, thanks. Have a great day.

**Becky:** [00:34:02] Thanks you too. See you next month.

**Mandy:** [00:34:04] Talk to you next time.

**Becky:** [00:34:06] Bye.

**Mandy:** [00:34:07] Bye.